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ALL STORIES NEW—NO REPRINTS

DECEMBER, 1972 VOL. 22, NO. 2

L. SPRAGUE DE CAMP'S GREAT NEW FANTASY NOVEL IN THE UNKNOWN TRADITION, THE FALLIBLE FIEND 6

new short stories

DARK OF THE STORM
by VINCENT PERKINS 60

THE GOOD WAR
by DAVID R. BUNCH 66

WHO'S AFRAID
by CALVIN DEMMON 72

A FINE NIGHT TO BE ALIVE
by ALEXEI PANSHIN 78

THE REAL WORLD
by F.M. BUSBY 82

portfolio

FRANK R. PAUL

THE SUNKEN WORLD
by STANTON A. COBLENTZ 108

new features

EDITORIAL by TED WHITE 4

LITERARY SWORDSMEN & SORCERERS (PRATT & HIS PARALLEL WORLDS)
by L. SPRAGUE DE CAMP 85

SF IN DIMENSION (THE DOMESTICATION OF THE FUTURE) (1936-1946)
by ALEXEI and CORY PANSHIN 94

ACCORDING TO YOU 119

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TED WHITE editorial

NOTES FROM ALL OVER: It is a hot, muggy day in August as I write this, and our preparations for a month's vacation are nearing their close. In about a week we will load ourselves—my wife Robin, our daughter Kitten, and Ed Smith who will be taking over *The Clubhouse* in AMAZING SF shortly—into my car for a leisurely drive across country to Albuquerque for the small sf convention to be held there the weekend before the World SF Convention, and thence onwards to Los Angeles for the main event. Following the LACon, we plan to drive up the coast, with a stopover in the Bay Area to visit our many friends there, and then up into redwood country again (the last time we were up that way was four years ago—just a month before I was given the job of editing these magazines—in the company of Andy Porter, the Assistant Editor over at *Fantasy & Science Fiction*) before cutting back east. It promises to be an enjoyable trip (I always enjoy driving across this country—it reaffirms my sense of wonder every time), but as the deadline to depart grows closer, the number of tasks to be completed before we leave seems to multiply astronomically. This editorial is the last thing to be done on this issue, but I have next month's issue of AMAZING yet to be dealt with, and a plethora of other chores confronting me.

One of them is the result of my involvement in local politics. When I say "politics," I mean that term in its broadest sense; I'm not talking about running for an elective office but rather local community action of the sort which often crucially determines the direction in which a small city will turn in the years ahead.

Falls Church is a very small city. In land area it occupies only about two square miles, and most often is made up of single-family residences; superficially, Falls Church is just another part of the greater metropolitan Washington suburbia which extends deep into surrounding Maryland and Virginia. The city has a population of only around 11,000, and is hemmed in by neighboring Arlington and Fairfax counties, both of which have been feeling the crunch of the post-WW2 population explosion. Expressways have been built and others are being bitterly contested in the courts. A subway is under construction, with two stations to serve this small city. And everywhere lurks the menace of the high-rise, the high-density, multi-million-dollar developments which promise to make fortunes for land speculators and wreak havoc upon the character of the neighborhoods. What is happening here is, in other words, not so very different from what is happening all over this country as growth goes unchecked and developers see fortunes dangling enticingly before them.

I grew up here at a time when Falls Church was far more rural in character: the home in which I live was once part of a jointly-owned farm. My boyhood memories are of woods and streams and fields; the street in front of our house (surveyed by my grandfather) was a pair of dirt ruts with grass growing between them. My only worry as a small boy was to avoid the cows which grazed behind the house.

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Oddly enough, it was easier some years ago to commute to Washington than it is now. As an example of Progress in Reverse, the trollycar with its own right-of-way to Washington (which is about eight miles to the east) was discontinued shortly before I was born; my mother tells of taking it to and from school each day, and my grandfather commuted on it to his federal office job with equal ease. Interstate 66, if it is ever built, will follow that right-of-way in this area. Right now one's choice lies between the bus (overcrowded and infrequent) or one's car (via local streets which are jammed at rush hour). The subway will not reach this area for at least another four years (maybe longer if I66 is not built—it was to occupy the median strip) but commuters are now coming in from twenty-five and thirty miles further out, from Loudin and Prince William counties, where giant corporations like ITT are engaged in building multi-thousand-house bedroom communities and "parks" in the middle of open farmland.

The pressure is enormous. Falls Church was developed long ago (mostly just before and following WW2) and our street is now lined with houses and tree-shaded lawns where once I roamed the fields and woods. The last open field, two blocks away, is now filling up with $50,000 prefab houses, some of which are already being occupied.

In many ways this small city is unique within the area. Tight zoning laws were drawn up not too many years ago to preserve its quiet residential nature and its oasis-like quality in the burgeoning suburban sprawl. These are now bending visibly under the attack of the land-speculators.

What directly involved me in this fight was a rezoning application for a large parcel of vacant land located about two blocks up the street. At one time this land was part of a large estate and was a beautifully wooded valley through which a quiet lane meadered. My parents used to take me for walks along that lane, past dangling grapevines as thick as my wrist and tall oaks and tulip-populars.

While I was in highschool, the land changed hands. Local gossip has it something of an unsavory deal; in settling the estate after the death of the owner, another man managed to acquire the land as his "fee". He almost immediately converted it to a landfill (charging those who dumped there for the privilege) and let it be known that he wanted a million dollars for the land.

The valley was filled in (improperly, as it later developed, for building upon) and became a sort of wasteland, covered with coarse grass and scrub growth. (In recent years the sumac trees yielded their fruit for a delicious summer drink and the rank growths of blackberry tangles gave us sixteen pints of berries last year for our freezer, with a couple of pies in the balance. It wasn't a total disaster.) Years passed. The land was zoned for single-family dwellings, and single-family dwellings faced it directly across the narrow street.

We all knew that ultimately that land would be developed in some fashion, but the official city planning maps showed that a quarter or so of it had been marked for a projected park, and it went unchanged in nature by anything but the seasons for more than fifteen years.

Last year the city officials, concerned over the lack of business development in the commercial center of the city (known as the Crossroads Area, because two main routes cross there; this was once the hub of the original village) passed a controversial new law. This law, known as PUD (Planned Unit Development) was ostensibly designed to encourage the commercial growth of this part of the city (which is presently mostly asphalt parking lots and little else) by allowing mixed development. For instance, commercial and residential development could be combined, with offices and stores on the lower levels and apartments above them. It was supposed to "encourage innovative development." To date there have been no proposals for development within the commercial area under the PUD ordinance, and the area still looks like it had been cleaned up after a riot had taken its toll of the business.

However, working with this new ordinance, the present owners of the land I was speaking about (the survivors of the man

(continued on page 117)

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This is Sprague de Camp's first new fantasy novel to be serialized in more than twenty years—and may remind older readers far more of the delightful fantasies he wrote thirty years ago for the late and much lamented Unknown. *For here he introduces us to the lands of Novaria and that most memorable demon, Zdim Akh's son, whose exploits on the Prime Plane soon brand him—*

THE FALLIBLE FIEND

L. SPRAGUE de CAMP

(First of two parts)

I. DOCTOR MALDIVIUS

ON THE FIRST DAY of the Month of the Crow, in the fifth year of King Tonio of Xylar (according to the Novarian calendar) I learnt that I had been drafted for a year's service on the Prime Plane, as those who dwell there vaingloriously call it. They refer to our plane as the Twelfth, whereas from our point of view, ours is the Prime Plane and theirs, the twelfth. But, since this is the tale of my servitude on the plane whereof Novaria forms a part, I will employ their terms.

I at once repaired to the court of the Provost of Ning. I had known the Provost before his elevation. In fact, as boy-demons we had hunted flitflowers together in the Marshes of Kshak, and I hoped to claim exemption on the basis of this old friendship. I said:

"My dear old Hwor, how good to see you again! All goes well with you, I trust?"

"Zdim Akh's son," said Hwor sternly, "you should know better than to address your Provost, in the discharge of his office, in familiar terms. Let us have due decorum."

"Well—ah—" I stammered. "I beg your pardon, Lord Provost. Now, about this notice of induction, I believe I may claim deferment."

"On what grounds?" said the Provost in his most grating official voice.

"Imprimis, on the ground that my mate, Yeth Ptyg's daughter, has just laid a clutch of eggs and needs me at home to help guard them. Secundus, having been trained in philosophy and logic, I am unsuited to the kind of

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rough-and-tumble, adventuresome life, which I am told, awaits one on the Prime Plane. Tertius, the philosopher Khrum, whose apprentice I am, has departed on a fortnight's fishing trip, leaving his effects, correspondence, and pupils in my care. And quartus, our crop of rabbages is nearly ripe and will need me to harvest it."

"Deferment denied. Imprimis, I shall send a bailiff to help your mate in guarding the eggs and collecting the crop. Secundus, besides your philosophy, you are also well-read in Prime Plane history and biography and so are better fitted to cope with the exigencies of that world than most demons sent thither. Tertius, a few days off will not harm the respected Khrum's pupils and correspondents. And quartus, we must have somebody, and your name has come up in the drawing. Our growing population and rising standard of living require more and more iron, and private interests must yield to the common good. So you shall report here three days hence for evocation."

Three days later, I bit Yeth good-bye and returned to the Provost's court. Hwor gave me parting advice:

"You will find the average Prime Planer a soft, weak being. Unarmed, he presents no threat. The folk of that plane, however, have conceived an array of lethal weapons, wherewith they practice the barbaric art of war. Do not needlessly expose yourself to harm from such weapons. Whereas we demons are stronger, tougher, and longer-lived than the men of the Prime Plane, it is not yet known for sure whether we have souls, which upon death move on to another dimension, as do the souls of Prime Planers."

"I will be careful," I said. "Khrum tells me that the Prime Plane afterworld is an extraordinary place, where gods are feeble wraiths, magic is virtually impotent, and most of the work is done by machinery. He assures me that, to preserve the symmetry of the cosmos, there should logically be an afterworld related to our plane in the same way—"

"I daresay," said Hwor. "You must excuse me, but I have a busy schedule. Take care for your safety, render faithful service, and obey the laws of the Prime Plane."

"But how if these laws be mutually contradictory? Or if my master command me to commit an illegality?"

"You will have to work that out as best you can." He pointed a claw. "Kindly stand on yonder pentacle."

I stepped to the center of the diagram, and the technician closed the figure with a piece of charcoal. Then I had to wait half an hour by the time candle.

At last the lines of the pentacle glowed red. Thereby I knew that he who had contracted for me had uttered his incantation. And then—*fthoomp!*—the Provost's courtroom vanished and I stood, instead, in a rough-hewn underground chamber, on a pentacle just like that in my own world. I knew that a hundred-pound ingot of iron had rested upon the pentacle whereon I now stood, and that this ingot had taken my place in the Twelfth Plane. Our accursed lack of iron compels us to indenture our citizens as bondservants to the Prime Planers.

The chamber was circular, about twenty feet in diameter and half as high. The surrounding wall had a single opening into a dark tunnel. The air had

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a dank, dead quality.

A pair of ornate brass lamps illumined the chamber. Volumes crowded bookshelves around the walls. Furnishings included chairs, tables, and a divan, all worn and battered. The tables were littered with bowls, braziers, balances, mortars, and other tools of a wizard's trade. On a small stand rested a holder, in which lay a blue sphere the size of a human being's fist. It was evidently a magical gemstone, for it glowed with a flickering light.

There were two human beings in the chamber. The elder was a thin, stoop-shouldered man almost as tall as I, which is quite tall for a Prime Planer. He had bushy gray whiskers, hair, and eyebrows and was clad in a patched black robe.

The other was a short, stout, swarthy, black-haired boy of about fifteen years, wearing waistcoat and hose and holding some of the wizard's paraphernalia. My tendrils picked up hostile vibrations from the boy, although at that time I had not known enough Prime Planers to interpret his emotions. From the way the youth shrank from me, however, I inferred that fear comprised a goodly part of them.

"Who are you?" said the elderly one in Novarian.

"I—Zdim Akh's son," I replied slowly. Although I had studied the language in school, I had never conversed with native Novarians. Fluency therefore came to me slowly. "Who—you?"

"I hight Doctor Maldivius, a diviner," replied the man. "This is Grax of Chemnis, my apprentice." He indicated the boy.

"Catfish!" said Grax.

"Mind your manners!" said Maldivius. "The fact that Zdim is indentured gives you no right to bully him."

"What—is—catfish?" I asked.

"A fish found in—ah—rivers and lakes on this plane," explained Maldivius. "That pair of tendrils on your upper lip remind him of the barbels of such a fish. Now, you have contracted to serve me for a year. Is this well understood?"

"Aye."

"Aye, sir!"

I wriggled my tendrils in annoyance, but this fellow had the upper hand of me. Although I could have broken him in two, my misbehavior would have caused me trouble when I got back to my own plane. Besides, we are told, before submitting to evocation, not to be surprised at anything Prime Planers do.

"Aye, sir," I said.

To one who has never seen a Prime Planer, they are repulsive. Instead of a coat of beautiful blue-gray scales, glistening with a metallic luster, they have soft, almost naked skins in various shades of pink, yellow, and brown. Once denizens of the tropics, they adapt themselves to cooler climes by covering these skins with woven fabrics. Their internal heat, combined with the insulation afforded by these structures, called "garments," enables them to survive cold that would freeze a demon stiff.

Their eyes have round pupils with only a small accommodation to light; hence they are almost blind at night. They have funny little round ears. Their faces are sunken in, their muzzles and fangs being hardly more than vestiges. They have no tails, and their fingers and toes end in flat, rudimentary claws called "nails."

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On the other hand, if in appearance and behavior they often seem bizarre, they are extremely clever and ingenious. They are endlessly fertile in thinking up plausible reasons for doing what they wish to do. I was astonished to learn that they have terms like "fiendishly clever" and "devilishly shrewd." Now, "fiend" and "devil" are opprobrious terms, which they apply to us demons—as if we had more of this perverted ingenuity than they!

"WHERE—AM—I?" I asked Maldivius.

"In an underground labyrinth beneath the ruined temple of Psaan, near the town of Chemnis."

"Where is that?"

"Chemnis is in the Republic of Ir, one of the Twelve Nations of Novaria. Chemnis lies at the mouth of our main river, the Kyamos. The city of Ir is nine leagues up the Kyamos. I have repaired this maze and turned the central chamber into my sanctum."

"What would you of me?"

"Your main duty will be to guard this chamber when I am absent. My books and magical accessories—especially that thing—are valuable."

"What is it, sir?"

"Ahem. It is the Sibylline Sapphire, a divinatory crystal of the highest quality. You shall guard it with care, and woe betide you if you carelessly knock over the stand and break the gem!"

"Should I not, then, remove it to one side, where it will not be in way?" I said.

The boy Grax puckered up his face—these human beings have very mobile, expressive faces when one learns to interpret them—in a glare of hostility. "Let me," he said. "I don't trust old Catfish." He moved the stand and turned to me. "Next thing, Master Catfish, you shall cook and clean for us, ha ha!"

"Me, cook and clean?" I said. "That female work! You should have evoked a demoness!"

"Ha!" sneered the youth. "I've been cooking and cleaning for three years, and I'll warrant it won't hurt you for a change."

I turned to Maldivius, who after all was my master. But the wizard only said: "Grax is correct. As his knowledge of the arcane arts advances, I shall require more and more of his time to assist me. Therefore he cannot continue his domestic duties."

"Well," I said, "I shall endeavor to give satisfaction. But you tell me, sir, that this place is near a town. Why not hire a woman from this town for these tasks? If it be like towns on my plane, there would be unattached females—"

"No argument, O demon! You must follow my orders, literally and exactly, without questioning. I will, however, answer your question. In the first place, the townsfolk would be terrified of you."

"Of me? But, sir, at home I am deemed the mildest and meekest of demons, a quiet student of philosophy—"

"And, second, I should have to teach the wench how to get in and out of this maze. For obvious reasons, I do not wish to publish this information to the world at large. Ahem. Now, to begin your duties, your first task will be to prepare tonight's dinner."

"Gods of Ning! How shall I do that, sir? Must I sally forth, to run down and slay some wild creature?"

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"Nay, nay, my good Zdim. Grax will show you to the kitchen and instruct you. If you begin now, you should have a savory repast ready by sunset."

"But, sir! I can broil a wild fluttersnake over a campfire on a hunting trip, but I have never cooked a real dinner in my life."

"Then learn, servant," said Maldivius.

"Come along, you!" said Grax, who had been lighting a small lanthorn at one of the brass lamps. He led me out of the chamber and into the tunnel. The path bent and wound this way and that, passing a number of branches and forks.

"How on earth do you ever find your way?" I asked.

"How on earff do I effer ffind my vay?" he said, mocking my accent. "You memorize a formula. Going out, 'tis right-left-right-left-left-right-right. Coming in, it's the opposite: left-left-right-right-left-right-left. Canst do that?"

I muttered the formulae. Then I asked: "Why does Doctor Maldivius locate his kitchen so far from his sanctum? The food will be cold by the time the cook gets it to his board."

"Silly! If we cooked inside the maze, the place would be filled with smoke and fumes. You will just have to run with your tray. Here we are."

We had reached the entrance to the maze, where the tortuous corridor straightened out. Doors opened into chambers on either hand, and at the far end I could see daylight.

There were four of these chambers. Two were fitted up as bedrooms; the third was used for storage of the dwellers' possessions. The fourth, next to the exit, was the kitchen. This last had a window cut in one wall.

In the window was mounted a casement with an iron frame and many small, leaded panes. The casement was now open, affording a view. The chamber was built into the side of a cliff, with the waves of the Western Ocean striking rocks at the base of the cliff a score of fathoms below. The cliff curved, so that from the window one had a good view of its precipitous slope. It was raining outside.

A stream of water had been diverted through an earthen pipe into the kitchen, so that it trickled from above into one of a pair of wooden sinks. Grax made a fire on the hearth and set out the spits, cauldrons, frying pans, forks, and other implements of cookery. Then he opened bins containing edibles and explained the nature of each, betimes berating me for my clumsiness and stupidity.

I learnt to interpret his vibrations as manifestations of hatred. I found this hard to understand, since I had done nothing to earn Grax's enmity. I suppose he was jealous of anyone who infringed his monopoly of old Maldivius' time and regard—despite the fact that I was here against my will, earning a meager hundred-weight of iron for the use of my people. I envied those who could afford to use iron for mere window casements.

Well, I went through many ordeals during my servitude on the Prime Plane, but never did I experience more exasperation than in preparing that dinner. Grax rattled off his instructions, set the sand glass going to time my cookery, and left me. I tried to follow his directions, but I kept confusing his figures for time, distance from the flame, and so forth.

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When I thought I had everything under control, I set out for the sanctum to ask further instructions. I promptly took a wrong turning and got lost in the maze. At last I found myself back at the entrance. With effort, I remembered the formula for entering the labyrinth and this time attained the sanctum without a mistake.

"Where is our dinner?" said Maldivius, sitting with Grax in two of the battered chairs. The twain were drinking, out of pottery cups, the liquor called *olikau*, imported from Paalua across the Western Ocean.

"I must ask you, sir—" and I requested more details. When the magician had given them, I found my way back to the entrance. The kitchen was full of smoke and stench; for, during my absence, the sliced ham, the main item, had burnt to a large black cinder.

I trailed back to the sanctum. "Well," snarled Maldivius, "Where is our dinner now?"

I told what had befallen.

"You idiot!" screamed the wizard. "By Zevatas' beard, of all the stupid, blundering, incompetent, feckless fiends I ever did know, you are the worst!"

He snatched up his wand and chased me around the chamber, whacking me on the head and shoulders. An ordinary stick of that size I should hardly have felt, but the wand gives a horrid tingling, burning sensation when it hits. By the third lap around, I began to feel resentment. I could easily have torn Doctor Maldivius limb from limb, but I was kept from doing so by the terms of my indenture and fear of my own government.

"Why don't we trade old Catfish in, boss?" said Master Grax. "Send him back to the Twelfth Plane and demand another one with at least the brains of a hoptoad."

Doctor Maldivius stood panting and leaning on his wand. "Take this wretched imitation of a demon back to the kitchen and start over."

Grax led me back through the maze, grinning and uttering many a quip on my want of intellect. (It is common practice among human beings to make these meaningless remarks they call "jokes," whereupon they bare their teeth and go "Ha ha ha." This seems to give them pleasure.) When we arrived, I found that all the water in the pot containing the turnips had boiled away, so that the turnips were half burnt and stuck to the pot.

It was three hours after my first arrival in the kitchen before I assembled a passable dinner for this pair of cantankerous conjurors. Then I got lost in the maze again on my way to the sanctum. By the time I found my customers, the victuals were cold. Luckily for me, the twain had by this time drunk so much olikau that they never noticed. Grax was in a fit of gigling. When I asked Maldivius when and what I myself was to eat, he only goggled at me and mumbled: "Huh? What? Who?"

So back I went to the kitchen and cooked my own dinner. It was no gourmet meal, but being ravenous I found it better than anything I have tasted before or since.

DURING THE following days, my cookery improved, albeit I do not think I could ever apply for a post as chef in the palace of a great lord of the Prime Plane. Then, when Grax was out on an errand, Maldivius called me in to the sanctum.

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"I am taking the mule to Ir on the morrow," he said. "I hope to be back two or three days thereafter. You will be alone most of the time. I would that you remained here in the sanctum on guard, save for the most necessary occasions. Fetch your repasts in here to eat. You can sleep on the divan."

"Will not Master Grax be here to keep me company, sir?"

"I know not what you mean by 'keeping company,' for it has not escaped me that the feelings betwixt you two can hardly be described as love. In any case, I know from experience that, even if I command Grax to remain, he will sneak off to Chemnis the minute I am out of sight. That is one reason for my having contracted for your services."

"Wherefore does he that, sir?"

Maldivius: "He has a girl in town, whom he visits for purposes of—ah—fornication. I have told him and told him that, to rise into the upper ranks of the profession, one must relinquish such fleshly pleasures. But he pays me no heed. Like most youths, he thinks that everybody older than himself is far gone in senile decay."

"Were you, sir, as abstemious as you wish him to be when you were his age?"

"Shut up and mind your business, you impudent rascal! Ahem. Attend closely. You shall remain on guard here, warding my property, especially the Sibylline Sapphire. If anyone enter the sanctum ere I return, you shall devour him instanter."

"Really, sir? I should think—"

"You are not indentured to think, but to follow orders! Listen, comprehend, and obey! The first person to enter the sanctum before my return is to be eaten alive! No exceptions! It is not as if they will not have been warned. Grax has lettered a sign, BEWARE OF THE DEMON, and posted it at the entrance. Do you understand?"

I sighed. "Aye, sir. May I take the liberty of asking the nature of your errand?"

Maldivius chuckled. "It is my chance to make what the vulgar call a 'killing.' For, in my Sapphire, I have seen doom approaching Ir. Since only I am cognizant of this, I should be able to squeeze a respectable fee out of the skinflint Syndics in return for this news."

"Sir, as a citizen of Ir, I should think you would deem it your duty to warn the state regardless of reward—"

"You dare to tell me my duty, sirrah?" Maldivius snatched up his wand as if to strike me but then mastered himself. "Some day I will explain. Suffice it to say that I have no particular loyalty to a city whose judges have fleeced me, whose rich have scorned me, where my colleagues have plotted against me, and where even the boys have followed me, throwing stones and hooting. An I obeyed my urges, I would let their doom overtake them. But to abandon an opportunity for profit for a petty revenge were youthful folly. Forget not your orders, now!"

II. JIMMON THE SYNDIC

I FOLLOWED THE WIZARD up the cliffside stairs to the top. Around us lay the ruined temple of Psaan, the Novarian god of the sea. The stumps of marble columns rose in ranks like a company of soldiers magically turned to stone, while separate column drums and fragments littered the cracked and tilted marble pave. Grass grew in the cracks. So did shrubs and even a few

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trees, which had canted the flags in their growth. There had once, Maldivius told me, been much more to the ruins, but for centuries the Chemnites had used the site as a quarry.

While I saddled up the mule and strapped the doctor's traveling bag to the cantle, Maldivius repeated his instructions. Then off he went.

Doctor Maldivius was right about his apprentice. The diviner was hardly out of sight, and I had started down the stair, when I had to halt to allow Master Grax, wearing his good doublet and boots, to ascend. The youth grinned.

"Well, old Catfish," he said, "I'm off to town. I'll warrant you wish you had what I'm going for!" He jerked his pelvis to illustrate.

"I own I shall miss my wife," I said. "but—"

"You mean demons have wives, just like people?"

"Of course. What thought you?"

"Methought that when you were fain to increase, you split down the middle and each half became a whole new demon, as Maldivius says some little water creatures do. Do you futter your wives as we do?"

"Aye, though not the year round, as you Prime Planers seem to."

Grax: "Well, why not come to Chemnis with me? I know a dame—"

"My orders forbid. Besides, I misdoubt that a human woman would enjoy carnal congress with me."

"Why not? Wrong size?"

"Nay; it is the spiny barbs on my male member."

"You actually *have* one?"

"Certes, inside."

"How do your women—demonesses, I suppose I should call them—take the spiny barbs?"

"They find them pleasantly stimulating. But now I needs must take up my post in the central chamber."

"Well, stupid, don't fall asleep and let some thief clean the place out! A couple of boys down in Chemnis wouldn't mind eking out their earnings by a bit of burglary. Expect me back on the morrow."

He strode off on the dusty track that Maldivius had taken. I returned to the sanctum. For several days I had been too busy to digest the food I had eaten and hence had become somewhat bloated. I welcomed the chance to sink into digestive torpor. This lasted into the following day, as I could tell from the little water clock on one of Maldivius' tables.

I had roused myself and was refilling the reservoir of the water clock, when I heard the sound of boot heels in the maze. It might, I thought, be Grax; or it might be an intruder.

Then I remembered how insistent Doctor Maldivius had been about my devouring the first person to enter the sanctum before his return. No exceptions, he had said; I must follow his orders literally and implicitly. When I tried to ask whether he was fain to except Master Grax, he had shut me off. Meseemed he wished me, for some arcane reason, to treat Grax as I would any other intruder.

Presently, Grax stood in the entrance with a sack of edibles, bought in the village, on one shoulder. "Hola there, stupid!" he cried. "Poor old Catfish, can do nought better than sit in the sanctum and look ugly, like the idol of some heathen god—no, what do you?"

Grax had advanced into the sanctum

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as he spoke. He had time for but one short scream as I sprang upon the youth, tore him to pieces, and ate him. I must say that he was pleasanter as provender than as a living companion.

Some things however, perturbed me. For one, the brief struggle had disordered the room. A table was overset, and gore was spattered far and wide. Fearing that Maldivius would chastise me for sloppy housekeeping, I set to work with bucket, mop, and broom and in an hour had almost erased all traces of the fracas. The larger bones of the late Grax I stacked neatly on an empty bookshelf. A gout of blood had struck a copy of *Material and Spiritual Perfection in Ten Easy Lessons*, by Voltiper of Kortoli, on the bookshelves. The blood had run between the pages, staining several with a large red blot.

As I worked, another thought oppressed me. On the Twelfth Plane, ever since Wonk the Reformer, devouring fellow beings alive has been strictly forbidden. I supposed that the Prime Plane had similar regulations, although I had had no opportunity to master this world's many legal systems. I was comforted to think that, since I acted under Maldivius' orders, the responsibility would be his.

DOCTOR MALDIVIUS returned late the next day. He asked: "Where is Grax?"

"Following your orders, master, I was compelled to devour him."

"What?"

"Aye, sir." I explained the circumstances.

"Imbecile!" shrieked the wizard, going for me with his wand again. "Fool! Dunce! Lout! Ass! Dolt! Blunderhead! What have I done to the gods, that they should visit a jolthead like you upon me?"

He was chasing and whacking me all the while. I darted out of the chamber but got lost in the maze. As a result, Maldivius cornered me at the end of a blind passage and continued his beating until exhaustion forced him to stop.

"Mean you," I said at last, "that you did not intend me to eat this youth?"

"Of course I mean it!" *Whack.* "Any idiot could have seen that!"

"But, sir, you expressly commanded me—" And I went through the logic of the situation again.

Maldivius raked his gray hair back from his face and drew his sleeve across his forehead. "Beshrew me, but I suppose I ought to have known better. Come back to the chamber." When we reached the sanctum, he said: "Gather up those bones, tie them together, and throw them into the sea."

"I am sorry, sir; I did but try to give satisfaction. As we say in Ning, no one being can excel in everything. Will Grax's disappearance entail any legal consequences for you?"

"Not likely. He was a kinless orphan; that was why he wished to become my apprentice. If, however, you should be asked, say that he fell from the cliff and was carried off by some denizen of the deep. Now let us plan a proper dinner, for I expect an eminent visitor tomorrow."

"Who is this, master?"

"His Excellency Jimmon, the Chief Syndic of Ir. I made them an offer, but they derided it and suggested one-tenth of my price as a just requital. Jimmon said he might drop by to discuss the matter further. This bids fair to be a lengthy haggle."

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"Are you sure, sir, that the doom you foresee will not come upon the land whilst you and the Syndics chaffer? As we say on my plane, a fish in the creel is worth two in the stream."

"Nay, nay; I keep watch on this menace by my Sapphire. We have a plenty of time."

"Sir, may I ask what sort of menace this is?"

"You may ask, ha ha, but I won't answer. I know better than to—ah—let this bird out of its cage by blabbing what's known only to me. Now get to work."

HIS EXCELLENCY the Syndic Jimmon was a fat, bald man borne in a litter, who stayed overnight while his servants went to Chemnis for lodging. I did my best to play the perfect servant. I had been told to stand behind the chair of the guest at dinner, to anticipate his every wish.

Betimes, Jimmon and Maldivius haggled over the price of revealing Ir's doom, and betimes they gossiped about events in Ir. Jimmon said:

"If someone stop not that accursed woman, by Thio's horns, she'll attain the Board of Syndics yet."

"What of it?" said Maldivius. "Since your government is based upon wealth, and Madame Roska has the wealth, why should you mind her taking her seat amongst you?"

"We have never had a woman syndic; 'twere unprecedented. Moreover, everyone knows what a silly female she is."

"Ahem. Not too silly to multiply her fortune, methinks."

"By witchcraft, belike. 'Tis said she dabbles in wizardry. Humph. The world is out of joint, when a feather-witted frail can amass such lucre. But let us talk of pleasanter things. Have you seen Bagardo's traveling circus, eh? 'Twas in Ir last fiftnight, and meseems Bagardo the Great is now touring the smaller towns and villages. His entertainment is not bad. But if he come to Chemnis, beware that he fleece you not. Like all such moutebanks, he's full of wiles and guile."

Maldivius chuckled. "He needs must arise early to fleece me and not—ah—the other way round. Stop your squirming, Your Excellency; my servant will not harm you. He is a very paragon of literal obedience."

"Then, wouldst mind asking him to stand behind your chair instead of mine? His looks disquiet me, and I'm getting a crick in my poor neck from craning it to view him."

Maldivius commanded me to change my place. I obeyed, albeit I found it hard to understand Jimmon's apprehensions. At home, I am deemed a perfectly average sort of demon, in no way outstanding or formidable.

THE NEXT DAY, Syndic Jimmon departed in his litter, bouncing on the shoulders of eight stalwart bearers. Maldivius told me: "Now understand once and for all, O Zdim, that your purpose in guarding my sanctum is not to slay anyone who happens by, but to forestall thievery. So you shall devour thieves and none other."

"But, master, how shall I know a thief?"

"By his actions, fool! If he seek to snatch some bauble of mine and make off with it, destroy him. But, if he be merely a customer wishing his horoscope cast, or a peddler with sundries for sale, or a villager from Chemnis

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who fain would exchange a sack of produce for aid in finding his wife's lost bangle, then seat him courteously and watch him closely until I return. But, unless he truly attempt to filch, *harm him not!* Have you got that through your adamantine skull?"

"Aye, sir."

For the next fortnight, little happened. I continued to cook and clean. Maldivius went once to Chemnis and once to Ir; Jimmon paid us one more visit. Maldivius and Jimmon continued their chaffer, inching towards each other's positions with snail-like sloth. At this rate, meseemed the predicted doom would have come and gone thrice over ere they reached agreement.

When not otherwise occupied, Maldivius consulted the Sibylline Sapphire. Since he insisted that I stand guard over him while he was in his vaticinatory trance, I soon learnt his procedure. He prayed; he burnt a mixture of spicy herbs in a little brazier and inhaled the smoke; he chanted a spell in the Mulvanian tongue, beginning:

Jyũ zormẽ barh tigai tyũvu;
Jyũ zormẽ barh tigau tyũvu . . .

I could tell from a sensation in my tendrils when the spell began to take effect.

Having mastered my domestic tasks, I found time hanging heavily on my hands. We demons are far more patient than these fidgety Prime Planers; natheless, I found sitting hour upon hour in the sanctum, doing absolutely nothing, more than a little tedious. At length I asked:

"Master, might I take the liberty of reading one of your books whilst I wait?"

"Why," said Maldivius, "can you read Novarian?"

"I studied it in school, and—"

"Mean you that you have schools, too, on the Twelfth Plane?"

"Certes, sir. How else should we rear our young in the ways they should go?"

Maldivius: "And young as well? Somehow I have never heard of a young demon."

"Naturally, since we do not permit the immature of our kind to serve on the Prime Plane. It were too hazardous for them. I assure you that we are hatched, and grow, and die like other sentient creatures. But about your books: I see you have a lexicon to help with words I know not. I beg you to suffer me to use it."

"Hm, hm. Not a bad idea. When you become skilled enough, belike you can read aloud to me, as poor Grax was wont to do. At my age, I needs must employ a reading glass, which makes reading a laborious business. What sort of book have you in mind?"

"I should like to start on this one, sir," I said, pulling out the copy of Voltiper's *Material and Spiritual Perfection in Ten Easy Lessons*. "Methinks I shall need all the perfection I can attain, to furnish satisfaction on this unfamiliar plane."

"Let me see that!" said he, snatching the book out of my claws. His old eyes—keen enough despite his words—had glimpsed the blots of blood that marred several pages. "A souvenir of poor Grax, eh? Lucky for you, O fiend, that the book is of no magical import. Take it, and may you profit from its advice."

So, with the help of Maldivius' lexicon, I began plowing through Voltiper of Kortoli. The second chapter was devoted to Voltiper's theories of diet. He was, it transpired, a

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vegetarian. He averred that only by eschewing the flesh of animals could the reader attain the sought-for perfect health and spiritual attunement with the cosmos. Voltiper also had moral objection to slaying sentient beings for food. He held that they had souls, even if rudimentary ones, and that they were akin to human beings as a result of evolutionary descent from common ancestors.

These moral arguments did not much concern me, since I was but a temporary resident of this plane. But I did wish better to adapt myself to the ways of the Prime Plane, to make my sojourn as painless as possible. I took up the vegetarian diet with Maldivius.

"A capital idea, Zdim," quoth he. "I once practiced such a regimen myself, but Grax was so insistent upon flesh that I weakly gave in to him. Let us both follow Voltiper's prescription. It will also abate our expenses."

So Maldivius and I ceased to buy meat at Chemnis and contented ourselves with bread and greens. Then the wizard said:

"O Zdim, the Sibylline Sapphire tells me that Bagardo's circus is coming to Chemnis. I shall go thither to witness the show and, incidentally, to put forth discreet inquiries for a successor to my whilom apprentice. Bide you here."

"I should like to see such a show, sir. I have been here for a month without stirring out of this ruin."

"What, *you* go to Chemnis? The gods forfend! I have it hard enough, keeping on the good side of the townspeople, without your scaring them out of their wits."

Since there was no help for it, I saddled up the mule, watched my master out of sight, and returned to the sanctum.

HOURS LATER, a sound distracted me from my reading. It seemed to come from above. Whereas the brass lamps did not strongly illumine the ceiling, I could easily see that a large, quadrilateral hole had appeared in the plaster. How the intruder lifted that oblong of plaster out of the way without breaking it or arousing me sooner I know not. The burglarious sleights of Prime Planers are too subtle for the simple, straightforward mind of an honest demon.

I sat, watching. Demons have the advantage over human beings of being able to remain truly motionless. A Prime Planer, even when he tries to hold still, is always moving and fidgeting. If nought else gives him away, the fact that he must needs breathe several times a minute will. The fact that we can change color, too, gives Prime Planers exaggerated notions of our powers—as the belief that we can vanish at will.

A rope came dangling down through the hole, and down this rope came a small man in dark, close-fitting garb. By happenstance, he had his back to me as he lowered himself. His first brief glance failed to note me, sitting quietly in my chair, matching my background and not even breathing. Like a frightened mouse, he scuttled on soundless soft shoes to the stand holding the Sibylline Sapphire.

Instanter, I was out of my chair and upon him. He snatched the gem and whirled. For a heartbeat we confronted each other, he with the gemstone in hand and me with fangs bared, ready to tear him apart and devour him.

But then I recalled Voltiper's insis-

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tence on vegetarianism and Maldivius' orders to follow Voltiper's dietary advice. Such being the case, I could obviously not devour the thief. On the other hand, my master had given me express commands to eat any flagrant robber.

Given these contradictory orders, I found myself palsied as surely as if I had been packed in ice and frozen stiff. With the best intentions, I could only stand like a stuffed beast in a museum while the thief darted around me and out, drawing from his wallet a tube full of glowworms to light his way.

After I had earnestly pondered these things for several minutes, it occurred to me what, belike, Maldivius would have wished me to do, had he known the full circumstances. This would have been to seize the thief, take the Sapphire from him, and hold him against the wizard's return. I think this was very clever of me. Of course, Prime Planers are much quicker of wit than we demons, and it is unfair to expect us to be so nimble-witted as they.

Alas, my solution came too late. I ran out of the maze and raced up the cliffside stair. By this time, however, there was no sign of Master Thief. I could not even hear his retreating footsteps. I cast about to try to pick up his odor but failed to strike a definite trail. The gem had gone for good.

WHEN Doctor Maldivius returned and learnt the news, he did not even beat me. He sat down, covered his face with his hands, and wept. At last he wiped his eyes and looked up, saying:

"O Zdim, I see that commanding you to cope with unforeseen contingencies is like—ah—like asking a horse to play the fiddle. Well, even if I be ruined, I need not compound my folly by retaining your bungling services."

"Mean you, sir, that I shall be dismissed back to my own plane?" I asked eagerly.

"Certes, no! The least I can do to recover my loss is to sell your contract. I know just the customer, too."

"What mean you, to sell my contract?"

"If you read the agreement betwixt the Government of Ning and the Forces of Progress—as we Novarian wizards call our professional society—you will see that indentures are explicitly made transferrable. I have a copy here somewhere." He fumbled in a chest.

"I protest, sir!" I cried. "That is no better than slavery!"

Maldivius straightened up with a scroll, which he unrolled and held to the lamplight.

"See you what it says here? And here? If you mislike these terms, take the matter up with your Provost at the end of your indenture. What did this thief look like?"

I described the fellow, mentioning such things as the small scar on his right cheek, which no mere Prime Planer would ever have noticed during a glimpse by lamplight.

"That would be Farimes of Hendau," said Maldivius. "I knew him of old, when I dwelt in Ir. Well, saddle up Rosebud again. I am for Chemnis the night."

The wizard left me in no very pleasant mood. I am a patient demon—infinitely more so than these hasty, headstrong human beings—but I could not help feeling that Doctor Maldivius was treating me unjustly. Twice in a row he had laid all the blame for our

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disasters on me, when it was his fault for issuing vague and contradictory orders.

I was tempted to use my decamping spell, to flit back to the Twelfth Plane and bring my complaints before the Provost. This spell is taught us ere we leave our own plane, so that we can return to it on the instant when threatened by imminent destruction. It is not to be used frivolously, for which use the penalties are severe. The fact that a demon can vanish when human beings are about to slay him has given Prime Planers overblown ideas of our powers.

The decamping spell, however, is long and complicated. When I tried to run over it in my mind, I found I had forgotten several lines and was therefore trapped on the Prime Plane. Perhaps it is just as well, for I might have been convicted of frivolous use of the spell and sent back to the Prime Plane under sentence of several years of indenture. And that had been just too dreadful a fate.

MALDIVIUS returned next morning with another man. Mounted on a fine piebald horse, the other man was clad in dashing, gaudy style compared with the somber, patched, and threadbare garments of my master. He was a man of early middle age, thin in the legs but massive in arms and body. He shaved his face but seemed to be fighting a losing battle against a thick, heavy, blue-black beard. Golden hoops dangled from his ears.

"This," said Doctor Maldivius, "is your new master, Bagardo the Great. Master Bagardo, meet Demon Zdim."

Bagardo stared me up and down. "He does look sound of wind and limb, albeit 'tis hard to judge an unfamiliar species. Well, Doctor, if you'll show me the paper, I will sign."

And that is how I become an indentured servant of Bagardo the Great, proprietor of a traveling carnival.

III. BAGARDO THE GREAT

"COME WITH ME," said Bagardo. As I followed him, he went on: "Let me get your name right. Za-dim, is that is?"

"Nay, Zdim," I said. "One syllable. Zdim son of Akh, if you would be formal."

Bagardo practised the name. I asked: "What will be my duties, sir?"

"Mainly, to scare the marks."

"Sir? I understand not."

"Marks, rubes, shills are what we circus folk call the customers who come to gawp." (Bagardo always called his establishment a "circus," although others alluded to it as a "carnival." The difference, I learnt, was that a true circus needs must have at least one elephant, whereas Bagardo had none.) "You will be put in a traveling cage and introduced as the terrible man-eating demon from the Twelfth Plane. And that's no lie, from what Maldivius tells me."

"Sir, I did but carry out my orders—"

"Never mind. I'll try to give more exact commands."

We came to where the track from the temple joined the road from Chemnis to Ir. Here stood a large, iron-barred cage on wheels, like a wagon. Hitched to the wagon, grazing, were a pair of animals like Maldivius' mule, save that they were covered with gaudy black-and-white stripes. On the driver's seat lolled a squat, lowbrowed, chinless creature, naked but for his thick, hairy

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pelt, like a man and yet not like a man.

"Is all well?" said Bagardo.

"All's well, boss," said the thing in a deep, croaking voice. "Who this?"

"A new member of our troupe, hight Zdim the Demon," quoth Bagardo. "Zdim, meet Ungah of Komilakh. He's what we call an ape-man."

"Shake, fellow slave," said Ungah, putting out a hairy paw.

"Shake?" said I, looking a question at Bagardo. "Like this, does he mean?" I twitched my hips back and forth.

Bagardo said: "Clasp his right hand in yours and squeeze gently whilst moving the hands up and down. Don't claw him."

I did so, saying: "I am gratified to make your acquaintance, Master Ungah. I am not a slave, but an indentured servant."

"Lucky losel! I must swink for Master Bagardo till death us part."

"You're better fed than you ever would be in the jungles of Komilakh, you know," said Bagardo.

"Aye, master; but food is not all."

"What, then? But we can't argue all day." Bagardo threw open the door of the cage. "Get in," he said.

The door closed with a clang. I sat down on a large wooden chest at one end of the cage. Bagardo swung up on the driver's seat beside Ungah, who clucked and shook the reins. The wagon lurched off to westward.

The road zigzagged down a long slope into the valley of the Kyamos River, which runs from Metouro across Ir to the sea. Another hour brought us in sight of Chemnis at the rivermouth. This is a small town by Prime Plane standards, but a busy one, for it is the main port of Ir. Over the roofs I saw the masts and yards of ships.

On the outskirts, a cluster of tents, gay with pennons, marked Bagardo's carnival. As the wagon turned into the field, I saw a score of men laboring to strike these tents and pack them into wagons. Others hitched horses to these wagons. The clatter and shouting could have been heard leagues away.

As my cage-wagon drew to a halt, Bagardo leapt down from his perch. "Ye idiots! Loafers! Idle witlings!" he yelled. "We should have been ready to roll by now! Can you do nought without me to command you? How shall we ever reach Evrodium by tomorrow night? Ungah, cease your insolent grinning, you bare-arsed ape! Get down and get to work! Let Zdim out; we need every hand."

The ape-man obediently descended and opened my door. As I issued from the cage, some of the others looked at me askance. They were, however, used to exotic creatures and soon returned to their tasks.

Ungah busied himself with lashing a sheet of canvas around a bundle of stakes. He handed me one end of the rope and said:

"Hold this. When I say pull, pull!"

On signal, I pulled. The rope broke, so that I fell backwards and got my tail muddy. Ungah looked at the broken ends of the rope with a puzzled frown.

"This rope seems sound," he said. "Must be you're stronger than I thought."

He tied the broken ends together and resumed his task, warning me not to exert my full force. By the time we had the bundle lashed and stowed, the main tent had come down and the workmen were cleaning up the last pieces of equipment. I could not but marvel how, despite the frightful confusion that had

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obtained before, everything was packed up at last. Bagardo, now mounted on his horse and wearing a trumpet on a cord around his neck, waved a wide-brimmed hat to emphasize his commands:

"Yare with that harness! Siglar, run your cat wagon up to the gate; I'm putting you at the head. Ungah, put Zdim back in his wagon and pull into line. . ."

"Back you go," said Ungah to me. When I was again in the cage, he untied the lashings of a pair of canvas rolls on the sides of the roof, so that the canvas fell down on both sides of the wagon. Since the ends of the cage were solid, I was cut off from the outside.

"Ho!" I cried. "Why are you shutting me in?"

"Orders," said Ungah, tying down the lower edges of the curtains. "Boss would not give Chemnites a free show."

"But I am fain to see the countryside!"

"Be at ease, Master Zdim. When we get into open country, I'll pull up a corner of your sheets."

Bagardo blew a shrill tucket. With a vast noise of cracking whips, neighing horses, clattering hooves, jingling harness, creaking axles, shouts, curses, warnings, jests, and snatches of song, the wagons lurched into motion. I could see nought, so for the first hour I settled into a digestive torpor, lolling and swaying on the wooden chest.

At length, I called out to remind Ungah of his promise. At a halt to breathe the horses, he untied the forward lower corner of one curtain and tied it up, affording me a three-sided window. I saw little but farmers' fields, with now and then a patch of forest or a glimpse of the Kyamos. The road was lined by a dense belt of spring wildflowers, in clusters of crimson, azure, purple, white, and gold.

When a bend in the road permitted, I saw the rest of the train before and behind. I counted seventeen wagons including my own. Bagardo cantered from one end of the line to the other, making sure that all went well.

We followed the road by which I had come to Chemnis. We climbed to the plateau whereon the temple stands, since the vale of the Kyamos here narrows to a gorge. The horses plodded slowly up the grade, while the workmen got out to push.

When we reached the plateau and passed the jointure with the path to the temple of Psaan, the road leveled and we went faster. We did not continue towards Ir but turned off on another road, which bypassed the capital to the south. As Ungah explained, we had milked Ir lately and her udder had not had time to refill.

We had covered less than half the distance to Evrodium when night descended upon us. The wagon train pulled off the road on an unplowed stretch of flatland, and the seventeen wagons formed a rough circle—for defense, Ungah told me, in the event of attack by marauders. The cook's tent and the dining tent were set up inside the circle, but the other tents were left in their wagons.

We ate by yellow lamplight at one of a number of tables in the long dining tent, together with fifty-odd other members on the troupe. Ungah pointed out individuals. Half were roustabouts—workers who did such chores as erecting and striking the tents; harnessing, driving, and unhitching the horses; fetching food and water to the beasts; and carrying off their dung.

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Of the rest of the company, half—a quarter of the total—were gamesters: that is, men who, for a rental fee, accompanied the carnival and plied their games with the public. These games entailed wagers on such things as the roll of dice, the turns of a wheel of fortune, or the location of a pea beneath one of three nutshells, all nicely contrived for the undoing of artless marks.

This left a mere sixteen or so of performers, who appeared before the audiences. These comprised Bagardo himself, as ring-master; a snake charmer; a lion tamer; a bareback rider; a dog trainer; a juggler; two clowns; three acrobats; four musicians (a drummer, a trumpeter, a fiddler, and a bagpiper); and an animal handler who, clad as a Mulvanian prince in turban and glass jewels, rode around the ring on the camel. There were also a cook and a costumer. These last, together with the snake charmer and the bareback rider, were women.

The company was more versatile than this list implies. Most of these folk doubled at other tasks: thus the snake charmer helped the cook to serve repasts, while the bareback rider—a buxom wench clept Dulnessa—assisted the costumer in cutting and stitching. Some roustabouts, seeking to work their way into better-paying jobs, betimes took the stead of performers when the latter were sick, drunk, or otherwise out of action.

After dinner, Ungah took me the rounds of the carnival, presenting me to individuals and showing me the exhibits. These included the camel, the lion, the leopard, and several smaller beasts such as Madam Paladné's snakes.

Ungah approached one long cage on wheels with caution. I sensed a distinctive odor about the cage, like that of Madam Paladné's serpents but stronger. Ungah pulled back the curtain.

" 'Tis the Paaluan dragon," he said. "Go not close, Zdim. It lies like dead thing for a fiftnight; then when some unwary wight comes too close: *snap!* And that is end of him. That's why Bagardo has trouble getting the roustabouts to service the brute; have lost two men to its maw in last year."

The dragon was a great, slate-colored lizard, over twenty feet long. As we neared the cage, it raised its head and shot a yard of forked tongue at me. I stepped close, trusting in my quickness to leap out of harm's way if it snapped. Instead, the dragon extended that tongue again and touched my face with a caressing motion. A wheezy grunt came from its throat.

"By Vaisus' brazen arse!" cried Ungah. "It *likes* you! It knows your smell as that of fellow reptile. Must tell Bagardo. Belike you could train the creature and ride about ring on it with the rest of parade. It seems stupid, and nobody has dared to meddle with it since Xion was et; but black wizards of Paalua train these beasts."

"It is a mickle of monster for me to handle alone," I said doubtfully.

"Oh, this one only half grown," said Ungah. "In Paalua, they get twice as big." He yawned. "Back to wagon; am fordone with today's stint."

At the wagon, Ungah took a pair of blankets out of his chest and handed me one, saying: "Straw in bottom of the chest, if you find the floor too hard."

THE NEXT day's sun had set when we came to Evrodium. The caravan's

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halting place was lit by torches and lanthorns, which shone on the eyeballs of a swarm of villagers standing about the margin of the lot.

"Zdim!" cried Ungah. "Bear hand!"

He unrolled the canvas I had helped him tie up. Inside was a bundle of stakes longer than I am tall. Our task was to drive these stakes at intervals into the ground and attach the canvas to them, to inclose the carnival and thwart the curious locals who wished to see but not pay. Ungah chose a place on the perimeter of the lot and pushed the first stake into the soft ground. He set a small stepladder behind it and pressed the handle of a mallet into my hand.

"Get up there and drive stake in," he directed.

I mounted the stepladder and gave the stake a tap.

"Hit hard!" cried Ungah. "Is that your best?"

"Mean you thus?" quoth I, swinging the mallet with full force. It came down with a crash, splintering the top of the stake and breaking the handle of the mallet.

"Zevatas, Franda, and Heryx!" yelled Ungah. "Meant not to smash it to kindling. Now must fetch another mallet. Wait here!"

One way or another, we got the canvas fence up. Meanwhile, the tents had been erected and the early confusion had subsided into an orderly bustle. Horses neighed, the camel gargled, the lion roared, and the other beasts made their proper noises. I asked:

"Shall we put on a show tonight?"

"Gods, no! Takes hours to get ready, and everybody too tired. We pass the morn in preparation and, if rain hold off, do one show. Then off on the road again."

"Wherefore pause we here so briefly?"

"Evrodium too small. By tomorrow night, all marks with money have seen the performance, and game players be cleaned out. Stay longer means battle with the marks. No profit in that." A gong sounded. "Dinner! Come along."

WE WERE up with the dawn, reading the day's performance. Bagardo came to see me.

"O Zdim," he said, "you shall be in the tent of monsters—"

"Your pardon, master, but I am no monster! I am but a normal, healthy—"

"Never mind! With us, you shall be a monster, and no back talk. Your wagon will form part of the wall of the tent, and the marks will move past it on the inner side. Ungah will be next to you. Since you occupy his cage, I'll chain him to a post. Your task is to fright the marks with hideous roars and howls. Speak no word of Novarian. You're not supposed to know how, you know."

"But sir, I not only speak it, I read and write—"

"Look here, demon, who's running this circus? You shall do as told, like it or not."

And so it befell. The villagers turned out in mass. From my cage, I heard the cries of the gamesters and the rattle of their devices, the tunes of the musical band, and the general uproar. Bagardo, splendidly attired, ushered a host of marks in with a florid oration:

". . .and first on your right, messires and mesdames, you see Madam Paladné and her deadly serpents, captured at inconceivable risk in the reeking tropical jungles of Mulvan. The large

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one is clept a constrictor. Were it to seize you, it would wrap you round, crush you to a jelly, and swallow you whole. . . Next, messires and mesdames, is a demon from the Twelfth Plane, evoked by the great warlock, Arkanius of Phthai. I knew Arkanius; in fact, he was a dear friend." Bagardo wiped his eyes with a kerchief. "But in evoking this bloodthirsty monster of supernatural strength and ferocity, he left a corner of his pentacle open, and the demon bit his head off."

Some of the audience gasped, and a few of the women uttered small shrieks. A mark, in a rustic accent I could scarcely understand, asked:

"How didst tha take him, then?"

"Arkanius' apprentice bravely cast a spell of immobility. . ."

I was so fascinated by Bagardo's account of my past that I forgot to roar until he scowled at me. Then I champed my jaws, hopped up and down, and did such other antics as seemed called for.

Bagardo gave an equally fictional account of the capture of Ungah, who sat on the ground chained to a post, behind a railing to keep the marks at a safe distance from his clutches. When the marks gathered at the railing, Ungah grimaced, roared, and slapped a sheet of iron with a length of chain, making a much more impressive racket than had I.

AFTER the performance, Bagardo unchained Ungah and opened my cage. Ungah entered the cage and dug out of the chest a huge, moth-eaten old cloak, a battered hat with a floppy brim, a pair of gap-toed boots, a belt, and a purse. He did on all these things.

"Wherefore the fine raiment, Master Ungah?" I asked.

"Boss insists. Go to Evrodium to buy things. When the light fails, villagers take me for roustabout. If they see Ungah the Terrible talking polite, they wouldn't pay to see me in tent. You want anything?"

"I know of nought at the moment. But tell me: What do you buy with?"

"Money. Bagardo gives me allowance."

An hour later, Ungah returned with his purchases: some sweetmeats, which he shared with me; a needle, thread, and scissors; and other things. After dinner, Ungah was patching his cloak by lamplight when Siglar, the lion tamer, approached our cage. Siglar, a tall, bony man with pale-blue eyes and lank, tow-colored hair, was a barbarian from the steppes of Shven to the north.

"Master Zdim!" he said. "The boss is fain to see you."

I suspected that Bagardo would complain about my lackluster performance. I said to Ungah: "Couldst accompany me, old fellow? I need moral support."

Ungah put away his sewing and came. We wended to Bagardo's small private wagon. Inside, the vehicle was luxuriously fitted up with silken drapes, a thick rug, and a silver-gilt lamp to shine upon this splendor.

Bagardo was seated at his desk, casting his accounts with a slate and a piece of chalk. "O Zdim!" he said. "In twenty years in this business, never have I seen a worse performance than yours. Briefly, you stink."

"I am sorry, master; I endeavor to give satisfaction, but to please everybody were oft impossible. If you paid me an allowance, I might be inspired to a more vital act."

"Oho, so that's it? With the circus teetering on the edge of failure and the

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entire company's pay in arrears, you strike me for pay. A murrain on you, demon!" He smote the desk so that his inkwell danced.

"Very well, sir," I replied. "I will do my best; but, in my state of destitution, that best may not be very good."

"Insolent ouph!" roared Bagardo. "I'll destitute you!" He came around the desk with the small whip that he cracked as ringmaster. He took a cut at me, and another. Since this was no magical wand, I scarcely felt the blows.

"Is that the hardest you can hit, sir?" I said.

He struck me a few more times, then hurled the whip into a corner. "Curse you, are you made of iron?"

"Not quite, sir. It is true that my tissues are stronger than yours. Now, how about that allowance? As we Twelfth Planers say, every pump needs a little priming betimes."

Red-faced, Bagardo glared. Then he laughed. "Oh, all right; you do have me by the balls, you know. How about threepence a day?"

"That were agreeable, master. Now, could I but have a few days' advance for pocket money. . ."

Bagardo brought ninepence out of his strongbox. "That'll have to do for the next fiftnight. Enough of sordid commercialism; who's for a game of skillet?"

"What is that, sir?" I asked.

"You shall see." Bagardo set out a small table and four folding chairs. As Siglar, Ungah, and I took our places. Bagardo produced a package of oblongs of stiff paper with designs upon them. Prime Planers play a multitude of games with these "cards," as they call them.

The rules of skillet seemed simple. Various combinations of cards outranked others, and the trick was to guess the other player's hands and wager on one's ability to outrank them. I had a terrible time in managing the cards with my claws, which are not suited to such slippery objects. I kept dropping the wretched things on the floor.

Bagardo kept up a fire of talk. He boasted grandly of his prowess in fertilizing the females of his species. He was especially proud of having copulated with six inmates of an institution called a whorehouse, all in one night. I was puzzled by the pride that male Prime Planers take in this ability, since any number of lower animals, such as the common goat, can easily outdo the human male in this regard.

When all had lauded Bagardo's penial powers, he said: "Zdim, since you arrived on this plane, have you known any wizards other than Doc Maldivius?"

"Nay, sir, save for his apprentice Grax, who—ah—met with misfortune. Why?"

"We need one. We had one, old Arkanius."

"I heard you mention him, sir. What really befell him?"

"Something not greatly different from the lies I told about him, I'll warrant. Arkanius would experiment with spells too fell for his limited powers. One night we saw blue flashes from his tent and heard screams. On the morrow there was no Arkanius—just a spattering of blood. I offered the job to Maldivius, but he declined, muttering something about the Paaluans' making his fortune for him. He was a bit drunk at the time. Know you aught of what he meant?"

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"Nay, sir. I have heard that Paalua is a land of mighty magicians across the ocean, but that is all."

"Bear it in mind. Dulnessa has been running a fortune-telling booth besides her regular work, but 'tis not the same as having a genuine magicker, you know. Whose deal is it?"

BAGARDO won my ninepence away from me, coin by coin. I noted that, from time to time, my tendrils picked up a strange vibration. This often happened when he was about to win some of my money. I could not, however, properly interpret the sensation. When I was down to my last farthing, the door opened and in came the buxom Madam Dulnessa, the bareback rider. In a raucous voice, she cried:

"When is one of you limp-yards coming over to service me?"

Bagardo said: "Take Zdim. He's broke, anyway."

"Mean you he *can*?" she said.

"Certes. Demons engender even as we do. Now get thee hence and leave us to our play."

Perplexed, I followed Dulnessa back to her wagon. When we were inside, she turned to me with a smile and half-closed eyes.

"Well, Zdimmy," she said, "This bids fair to be at least a new sensation."

With that, she began to remove her clothing in a slow and provocative manner. When she had doffed all her garments, she lay supine on her bed. I was naturally interested, since this was my first view of a live human female without clothing. I was gratified to observe that the illustrations in the schoolbooks on my own plane were correct in their depiction of the form and organs of this species. My tendrils perceived a vibration of extraordinary intensity, which I did not recognize.

"Now go to it, if you have the means to go to it with," she said.

"I crave your pardon, madam," I replied, "but I understand not. What do you wish me to do?"

"Oh, by Astis' teats! Don't you know how to futter, frike, hump, prang, spit, screw, frig, riddle, dip your wick, or whatever they call it in demon land?"

I began to see. "Mean you to engage in carnal communion with you, madam?"

"Whoops, what pretty language! Aye, I mean just that."

"I am sorry, but I was taught only the refined, literary form of Novarian in school. The vulgarisms I have had to pick up on my own."

"Well, have you in sooth a true prick under all those scales—and, hey, you're changing color!"

"Emotion so affects us, madam. I assure you that I am equipped with a proper male organ. Amongst us, however, it is withdrawn within the body when not in use, instead of dangling vulgarly and vulnerably as amongst human males. Doubtless that is the cause of this curious custom—which has long puzzled our philosophers—of wearing garments, even in the hottest weather. Now, amongst us demons—"

Dulnessa: "Spare me the lecture. Canst do it?"

"I know not. Althought I strive to give satisfaction, this is not the breeding season, nor does the sight of a Prime Plane female arouse my desires."

"What's the matter with me, dragon-man? True, I'm not so young as once upon a time, but—"

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"That is beside the point, if you will pardon my saying so, madam. With that soft, pale, nude skin all over, you look—how shall I say it?—squashy. It were like copulating with a giant jellyfish, ugh! Now if it were my wife Yeth, with her pretty fangs and tendrils and her lovely, glittering scales—"

"Then close your eyes, fancy 'tis your wife lying here, and try to work up a stand."

Well, as we say at home, nought essayed, nought achieved. By a powerful effort of will, I envisaged my dear mate and felt the blood rush into my loins. When I was sure I was an upstanding demon, I opened my eyes.

Dulnessa was staring at my yard with horror. "My gods!" she cried. "Put that ghastly thing away! It looks like one of those spiky maces that knights bash in each other's armor with. 'Twould slay me dead!"

"I regret not to be of service to you, madam," I said. "I feared you would not find the prospect pleasing. Now why should Master Bagardo have sent me with you? It seems like one of those irrational 'jokes' that you human beings are ever perpetrating. If Bagardo has lust enough for a score of women, I should think he were glad of the opportunity—"

"That bully-rook talks a fine futter, but his performance fails to match his brag. The last time, he had to call on Siglar to take his place after one gallop. The ape-man's worth three of him on a pallet."

"Do all human females require such constant replenishment?"

"Nay; I'm a special case. Because I wouldn't let him make free with my coynte, the cursed Arkanius cast a spell upon me: the spell of unrequited lust. He was a dirty old lob, and I joyed when the demon fanged him. But that leaves me under the spell, with no wizard to lift it."

"Perhaps it will wear off in time," I said. "Spells do, I understand."

"Maybe so; but meanwhile, if I be not well stroked several times daily, my hot cleft drives me mad."

"I should think, with all these lusty roustabouts—"

"Most never bathe, and I prefer cleanly lovers. Still, if all else fail. . . But to get back to your game. How fared you?"

I told of my loss.

"Ha!" she said. "'Tis like Bagardo to advance you money and then get it back by card-sharping."

"Mean you he cheated me?"

"Certes! What thought you?"

I pondered. "That must be the meaning of that tingle I sensed."

"Canst read minds?"

"Nay, but I detect vibrations that betray the emotions of other beings."

"How much does he pay you?"

"Threepence a day."

She laughed hoarsely. "My dear Zdim, you go right back to Bagardo and make him double it; he pays the roustabouts sixpence. Then borrow another advance and win back your poke. That will be the right sort of joke on that great coystril!"

I did as bidden. Bagardo laughed heartily at the tale of Dulnessa's abortive seduction. It put him in such a good humor, in fact, that he even agreed to the rise in my pay, doubtless counting on speedily winning it back.

We resumed the game. By dropping out instantly every time I felt the warning tingle, I soon had won back several times the original advance. Ba-

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gardo stared, saying:

"I must be losing my card sense. Anyway, 'tis time we were abed. We needs must rise early to get to Orynx, you know. I maun say, Master Zdim, you have mastered skillet the quickest of anyone I've taught. Are you in some sort a mind reader?"

"Nay, master." My reply was truthful if "mind" be taken in the strictest sense, as comprising only the intellectual faculties; but some might take philosophical exception to it on the ground that the term should be extended to include the emotions, which I could in fact read. I went on: "The principles are not difficult. As we say in my world, perfection waits upon practice."

"Too bad you don't read minds; I could use you in an act. At the next show, now, remember: when the customers flock in, go into a veritable frenzy. They expect it. Roar, howl, shake the bars as if you would leap down amongst the marks. Strive your utmost to escape from the cage!"

Ungah said: "Boss, I think—"

"Never mind your thoughts, Master Ape. I would make sure this demon knows his script."

ORYNX, up the Kyamos from Ir, is larger than Evrodium, albeit smaller than Chemnis. We planned to spend two full days there and to give three performances: two of evenings and one on the second afternoon. We opened the first show on the even of the first day.

The first mark to enter the tent of monsters was an old man with a wobbling gait. From the odor of wine he emitted, I inferred that his unsteadiness was due not merely to age. He staggered up to my wagon and peered. I returned his gaze, not wishing to go into my ferocity act until I had garnered a larger audience.

The aged man took a bottle out of his coat and drank. He muttered: "Dip me in dung, but now a see them everywhere. Go away, spook! Evanish! Get tha gone! O gods, ask me ne to give up me drink, me old man's milk, me one remaining solace!"

He reeled away, weeping, and other rubes streamed in. When Bagardo had given his turgid introduction, I growled, roared, screamed, and beat on the bars. Remembering my orders, I seized two bars and pulled them until they bent.

The nearest marks recoiled, while those further back pressed forward. Bagardo flashed me a grin of approval. Thus encouraged, I gave forth a bellow like that of a turtle-dragon of the Marshes of Kshak and put forth my full strength.

The bars bowed outward. With a loud snapping sound, one pulled out of its lower socket. I tore it out of its upper socket as well and cast it clattering from me. Then, as instructed, I squeezed through the gap and leapt to the ground, roaring and snatching at the nearest marks.

I had no intention of harming the customers; I merely essayed to put on a good show. But the marks in front hurled themselves back with piercing screams. In a trice, the floor of the tent was a shambles of struggling bodies. Prime Planers fought and scrambled and fell over one another in their haste to get out, shrieking: "The fiend's loose!"

As they poured out into the night, their panic spread to others, who were

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streaming in the gate and towards the main tent. I have never witnessed such irrational behavior on the Twelfth Plane. We may be slow of wit, but an unwelcome surprise does not drive us insane.

Some people tried to climb over or burrow under the canvas fence around the lot. Those who had been knocked down and trampled limped or crawled towards the exit. Fights broke out. Some of the gamesters' booths were upset, and townsfolk began looting them. A tent blazed up. Somebody shouted: "Hey, rube!" Thereupon the roustabouts fell upon the marks with tent stakes or any other weapon they could improvise.

The deafening noise died down as all the marks who could still do so fled. Many lay hurt or unconscious about the lot. I glimpsed Bagardo, muddy and battered, staggering about and trying to bring his company to order. Seeing me, he yelled:

"You've ruined me, you lousy spook! I'll kill you for this!"

Others ran between us, and I lost sight of him. I followed Ungah in fighting the fire of the burning tent. By the time we had it out, a man wearing a helmet, a mail shirt, and a sword appeared on horseback at the entrance. A score of locals with crossbows, spears, and staves followed him afoot. The mounted man blew a trumpet.

"Who in the forty-nine hells are you?" said Bagardo, confronting the horse with fists on hips.

"Valtho, constable of Orynx. These be my deputies. Now hear this! Ye do all be under arrest for injuries done the citizens of Orynx. Ye face criminal charges and civil suits. Since our gaol would ne hold so many, ye shall remain here under guard the night—ho, whither go ye, sirrah? Stop th[illegible] man!"

Bagardo ran back among the tents. Before any could catch him, he had thrown himself upon the piebald horse and kicked it to a gallop. He raced through the scattering carnival folk.

"Futter you!" he screamed.

The horse soared over the fence, and Bagardo was gone into the night. Constable Valtho shouted an order to his men, who began to spread out and surround the lot, and spurred clattering after Bagardo. Several carnival folk ran off into the dark, to cut their way through the fence before the circle closed. I said to Ungah:

"Ought we not to flee, too?"

"Why? Can't get along on our own, for every man be against us. Best we can hope for is better masters. So take it easy."

Presently the constable came back from his fruitless pursuit of the showman, his horse puffing and blowing, to superintend the posting of his men. In the panic, one man had perished. This was the old drunkard, trampled to death at the entrance to the tent of monsters. There were many injuries, such as broken limbs and ribs. Besides these, every Oryncian who had even been jostled or gotten a spot on his coat had filed suit against Bagardo the Great. Had Bagardo been master of ten carnivals, each more prosperous than this one, he still could never have satisfied all the judgments against him. Had he not fled, he had probably ended in debt slavery.

BEFORE the magistrate in Orynx, I explained that I was not really a bloodthirsty monster but just a poor indentured demon trying to follow his

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master's orders.

"You do not sound like a fiend," said the magistrate. "On the other hand, you are not human, so destroying you were no murder. Many citizens favor that measure for their own protection."

"Permit me to say that they might find my destruction difficult, your honor," I told him, "as anyone who has dealt with the Twelfth Plane will tell you. Moreover, I can forestall such a fate by returning to my own plane." (I was bluffing, having forgotten part of the decamping spell.) "So long as no extreme measure be attempted, however, I am fain to cooperate with the good people of Orynx in obeying their laws and meeting my obligations."

The magistrate—one of the few reasonable Prime Planers I met—agreed that I ought to be given a chance. About half the company had escaped from the lot ere it was surrounded. The members of the troupe who had been captured had so few possessions that, rather than support them in idleness in the gaol, the magistrate let them go with warnings.

The animals, including Ungah and myself, and the wagons, tents, and other properties were gathered, inventoried, and sent down the road to Ir to be sold. The auction was a dreary business, and I doubt if the plaintiffs in Orynx got a farthing to the mark on their claims. But that is how my contract of indenture was bought, at the auction ground outside the city, by an agent for Madam Roska of Ir.

IV. MADAM ROSKA

IR IS A PECULIAR CITY, lying at the edge of a cluster of hills beside a small tributary of the Kyamos, the Vomantikon. Save for the huge cylindrical tower surrounding the entrance, it is built entirely underground. It was conceived as a stronghold by Ardyman the Terrible, when he sought to unite all twelve Novarian nations under his rule. Finding a mass of solid granite in the hills of Ir, he caused the city to be dug into the mountainside, with tunnels and caverns serving the offices of streets and houses.

When Madam Roska's agent, Noïthen, had tucked my contract of indenture into his doublet, he said: "Come along, O Zdim. We wait upon my mistress."

A short, gorbellied man, Master Noïthen led me to the tower. This was a structure of well-fitted granite ashlars, over a hundred feet wide and thrice as great in diameter. A ramp, wide enough for a laden wagon, wound spirally about the cylinder, going up in such wise that he who ascended had his right or unshielded side towards the wall.

A third of the way up, the ramp ended at a huge portal, with valves made of whole tree trunks squared and held together with bronzen brackets. This portal now stood open. From the platform whereon it looked, a narrow, spiral stair continued up around the tower for one complete turn, ending at a higher and smaller door.

The castellated upper rim of the tower was higher yet. The booms of catapults projected out over the edge. The roof also upheld a complicated structure, which I saw from afar but did not understand until I had followed Noïthen through the main portal, past a pair of tall, blond guards.

"Who are those fellows?" I asked

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Noïthen. "They look not like Novarians."

"Mercenaries from Shven. We are no warmongers, but a nation of peaceful farmers and merchants. Hence we hire the Shvenites to do our bloodletting for us. In peacetime, as now, they serve as our civic guard and police."

Inside the portal, a spacious circular courtyard, open to the sky, filled the center of the tower. Around the walls, a series of huge casemates, upheld by arcades, provided space for the city's defenders and their equipment. Above the topmost of these rows of chambers rose the ring-shaped roof whereon stood the catapults.

There also arose the structure I had seen from without. It was a huge mirror on a clockwork mounting, so that it followed the course of the sun during the day. In planning his city, Ardyman had slighted the problem of ventilation. To see in their burrows, the Irians had to burn lamps and candles, and to cook they had to burn fuel. The smoke and soot of these fires distressed them, to say nothing of the vitiation of the air. Furthermore, this condition worsened as the city grew and its galleries extended farther and farther into Mount Ir.

At last, an ingenious syndic persuaded the people to install a system of lighting by reflected sunlight. This at least made lamps superfluous on sunny days. The main mirror, mounted atop Ardyman's Tower, cast the sun's beams down into the courtyard, whence another mirror reflected them down the main street—Ardyman Avenue—of Ir. Smaller mirrors diverted the rays down side streets and thence into individual dwellings.

WHEN I speak of cave dwellings, do not envisage a natural cavern, bedight with stalactites and inhabited by a handful of skin-clad primitives. Ir City had been hewn from the rock by the ablest Novarian masons. Its aspect, save for the roof of rock overhead in place of sky, was not unlike that of any rich city of the Prime Plane.

The house fronts, which reached up to this stone roof, were like other house fronts. The masons had even carved lines on them to simulate the joints between the bricks or stones of ordinary houses. Since the structure was one solid mass of rock, these carvings served no useful purpose save to make the scene look more familiar.

Most of the dwellings of Ir were on the same level as the courtyard of Ardyman's tower. There were other levels, above and below the main one, but these had been built after the original. As we wound our way along Ardyman Avenue, through the passing throngs, Noïthen asked:

"Were you not once indentured to Maldivius the diviner?"

"Aye, sir. He evoked me from my own plane and later sold my contract to Bagardo the showman."

"Did Maldivius suffer some grave loss whilst you were with him?"

"That he did, sir. A thief made off with his scrying stone, which he called the Sibylline Sapphire. He blamed me for the loss; hence the change in my indenture."

"Who took the stone?"

"It was—let me think—Maldivius said the thief was one Farimes, whom he had known erewhile. Why, sir?"

"You'll find out when you know your new mistress, Madam Roska sar-Blixens."

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"Master Nöithen, have the goodness to explain your system of names and titles. I am but a poor, ignorant demon—"

"She's the widow of the Syndic Blixens, and now she's fain to become a Syndic on her own."

We turned into a side street and stopped before one of the larger edifices. We were admitted by a servant: A small, swarthy, hook-nosed man in the robe and head cloth of Fedirun. Presently we entered my new mistress's study, where the furnishings were as much superior to those of the chamber in Maldivius' maze, or in Bagardo's wagon, as fine wine is to ditch water. Although it was a sunny day and private citizens were not supposed to use artificial light, drawing all their illumination from the great mirror, three candles natheless glowed in a sconce on the wall.

MADAM ROSKA sat at her desk, clad in a long robe of some sheer, filmy stuff, through which the natural Roska was plain to see. The sight of a human female in this state fascinates and excites the male, but that is just one of the oddities in the reproductive behavior of this species.

Roska was a tall, slender woman with gray hair, painstakingly done up into a graceful coiffure. She had narrow, refined features of a kind that, I was told, is deemed highly beautiful in Novaria. (I cannot judge such matters myself, since to me all Prime Planers look much alike.) Although well past her youth, she had retained much of her youthful smoothness and regularity of feature.

She smiled at us as the Fediruni ushered us in. "I see you got him, my good Nöithen."

"Your ladyship," said Nöithen, sinking to one knee and then rising again.

"Dear Nöithen, so faithful! Do show Master Zdim about my dwelling, present him to the rest of my staff, and explain his position—nay, I've changed my mind. Come hither, O Zdim."

I was flattered at being addressed as "Master," which title is not usually given to servants in Novaria. I approached.

"Are you in sooth he who served Doctor Maldivius, in his lair near Chemnis?" she asked.

"Aye, madam."

"Heard you him speak of some danger overhanging Ir?"

"Aye, mistress. He chaffered with the Syndic Jimmon over the price of revealing this peril."

"And didn't he sell your indenture in resentment of your allowing Farimes of Hendau to steal his magical gemstone?"

"Aye."

"Didst ever watch him whilst he scried?"

"As to that, madam, he insisted that I stand guard over him during his divinatory trances. So I am well acquainted with his methods."

"Ah! We shall see. Let us proceed at once to my oratory and try your knowledge. You may go, Nöithen."

Nöithen: "If your ladyship consider herself safe alone with this—this—"

"Oh, fear not for me. My little dragon-man is a model of propriety. Come, Zdim."

The oratory was a small, eight-sided room in a corner of the house, cluttered with magical paraphernalia like that of

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Maldivius' sanctum. On a table in the center stood a bowl holding a gem exactly like the Sibylline Sapphire.

"Is that Maldivius' gem, Madam?" I asked.

She giggled. "You've guessed it. 'Twas naughty of me to let Noithen buy it from a notorious purveyor of stolen goods, but the welfare of our land demands that it be in responsible hands. Besides, Maldivius has too many old enemies in Ir City to return hither and sue me. Now tell me just what Maldivius did when he scried!"

"Well, my lady, first he prayed. Then—"

"What prayer said he?"

"The common one to Zevatas—the one that begins: 'Father Zevatas, king of the gods, architect of the universe, lord of all, may thy name be honored forever . . .'"

"Yes, yes, I know. Then what?"

"Then he made a preparation of herbs—"

"Which herbs?"

"I know not all of them; but I think one was basil, from the smell . . ."

Madam Roska got out one of her books of magic and checked through the recipes. Between this book and what I could recall of Maldivius' procedure, we reconstructed most of the spell that put Maldivius into his trances. At last we could get no further.

"Most naughty of you, Zdim darling, very naughty indeed, not to have watched more closely and remembered better!" she said, patting a yawn. I was taken aback by being addressed as "darling" and wondered if this would be repetition of my embarrassing encounter with Dulnessa the bareback rider. My tendrils, however, failed to detect any lustful emotions, and I soon learnt that this was merely Roska's usual mode of address. To get along on the Prime Plane, one must realize that human beings do not, half the time mean what they say. She continued:

"But I do weary of this pursuit, and my art calls me. Awad!"

The Fediruni appeared, bowing.

"Take Master Zdim away," said Roska, "and put him to some simple household task until the morrow. And—whilst I remember—tell Philigor to put him on the payroll at ninepence a day. Thank you."

As Awad led me away, I asked: "What is Her Ladyship's art?"

"This year, 'tis painting."

"What was it wilom?"

"Last year, 'twas making ornamental feather sprays; the year before that, playing the cithern. Next year 'twill be something else, I'll wager."

During the next few days, I learnt that Madam Roska was a very talented and energetic woman. She could never, however, adhere to any one course long enough to follow it to its outcome. She could change her mind and her plans oftener than anyone I have known, even among these fickle Prime Planers. Remembering Jimmon's words, I wondered how so light-minded a person had not only kept but even augmented the estate she had inherited. I suppose that, beneath her superficial volatility, she hid a core of hard-headed shrewdness, or else that she had had a run of astounding luck.

On the other hand, she was always poised, polite, and gracious, even to the meanest of those she commanded. When she had driven them frantic by her sudden changes of plan, and they muttered and growled against her in

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their quarters, someone was sure to defend her by saying:

"After all, she *is* a lady."

These gatherings of the twenty-odd servants were frequent, since Roska rode her help with a light rein. They were also hotbeds of gossip. I learnt among other things that half the unattached men of the upper classes in Ir City were suitors for Roska's hand—or at least for the Blixens fortune. Plenty of attached ones, for that matter, would have been glad to shed the wives they had and replace them by Roska. The servants had a pool on who would succeed, but there was no sign yet that any bettor would soon collect the pot.

BETWEEN us, Roska and I reconstructed Maldivius' entire spell. We were ready to embark upon this magical work when she said:

"Ah, no, darling Zdim; I am suddenly terrified of what I might see. Here, take my place. Canst scry?"

"I know not, madam, never having tried it."

"Well, try it now. Begin with the prayer to Zevatas."

"I endeavor to give satisfaction," I said and settled myself in her chair. I recited the prayer, but without feeling, since the gods of Ning are not those of Novaria. I sniffed the fumes and spake the Mulvanian cantrip:

Jyü zormë barh tigai tyüvu . . .

Sure enough, the flickering lights in the Sapphire began to take form. First came a cloudy confusion of scenes: bits of sky and cloud, land and sea, all mixed up and shifting. One instant, I seemed to be looking down upon the earth from a height, as if I were a bird; the next, it was as if I lay on a meadow, looking out between blades of grass. Then I seemed to be sunken in the sea, where dim, finny forms moved in and out of the blue distance. After a while I learnt to control these effects, so that my viewpoint became fixed.

"What shall I look for?" I said. Speaking while in such a trance is like trying to talk with one's head wrapped in a blanket.

"The menace that Maldivius said threatens Ir," she said.

"I heard of this menace, but Maldivius did not reveal its nature."

"Think, now. Was it that some neighboring nation plans mischief?"

"I heard of no such thing. Are any of these neighbors at enmity with Ir?"

"We are at peace with all, said peace being no uneasier than usual. Tonio of Xylar is unfriendly, being leagued with Govannian against our ally Metouro; but that pot's on a low simmer for the nonce. Besides, Tonio loses his head within the year—"

"Madam! What has this man done, that you speak so casually of depriving him of his head?"

"'Tis the custom in Xylar to cut off the king's head every five years and toss it up for grabs by way of choosing the next king. But enough of that; back to our menace. Could it be that danger threatens from some more distant land—from Shven beyond the Ellornas, perchance, or Paalua beyond the seas?"

"I remember!" I said. "Bagardo quoated Maldivius as saying that the Paaluans should make his fortune."

"Then let's fly—I mean, let your mystic vision fly—to Paalua, to see what those folk are up to."

"Whither, my lady?"

"Westward."

My vision in the Sapphire had become blurred during this colloquy, and

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it took another sniff of the fumes and a repetition of the cantrip to bring it back into focus. I forced my point of view to rise and moved it westward, steering by the sun. My control was still far from perfect; once I blundered into a hill, whereupon all went black until I emerged on the further side.

The hills of Ir fled beneath me, and then the coastal plain and the valley of the Kyamos. I flashed over Chemnis with its ships, out the estuary, and over the broad blue sea.

League after league I sped, seeing nought but an occasional sea bird and once a spouting whale. Then a cluster of black specks drew my regard. Soon they became a fleet. Long, sharpended ships they were, each with a single square sail bellying before a fair wind.

I dropped down for a closer look. The decks were thronged with figures, quite different from Novarians. Most were utterly naked, while a few had fluttering cloaks loosely thrown about them. They were nigh unto black of skin, with mops of curly hair and large curly beards. Hair and beards varied from black to rusty brown. Black eyes looked out from cavernous eye sockets under beetling brow, and their noses were wide and flat, with no bridge.

Madam Roska became more and more excited as I described what I saw. Then came an interruption. From the poop of the ship on which I was scrying came a scrawny old Paaluan, with white hair and beard. He held what looked like a human leg bone, and his eyes searched all about him. At last he seemed to stare at me from the depths of the gem. He shouted inaudibly and pointed his bone at me. The vision blurred and broke into dancing motes of light.

When I reported this to Roska, she paced the floor of the oratory, chewing her nails. "The Paaluans," she said, "are plainly bent upon bale. The Syndics must be warned."

"What do the Paaluans desire, madam?"

"To fill their larders, that's what."

"Mean you they are cannibals?"

"Exactly."

"Tell me, my lady, what sort of folk are they? I understood that, on this plane, folk who went naked and ate other human beings were deemed primitive savages. Yet the Paaluans' ships seemed well built and appointed—albeit I am no expert on such things."

"They're no savages; in fact, they have a high civilization, but vastly different from ours. Many of their customs, such as public nudity and anthropophagy, we deem barbarous. Now, what's to do? If I go to the Syndics, they'll say I do but try to alarm them in hope of getting my seat on their board. Could you bear the news?"

"Why, madam, if brought into their presence, I could tell them what I have seen. But I have no authority to demand the loan of their ears."

"I see, I see. We shall both have to do it. Summon my tiring woman."

Soon after, Madam Roska, clad for the street, called for her litter. But then a lady friend of hers sounded the door knocker. When this woman entered, there were cries of "Darling!" and "Precious!" The next I knew, the urgent mission to the Syndics was forgotten while the two women sat and gossiped. By the time the visitor left, the reflected sunlight was dimming and dinnertime approached.

"'Tis too late to do aught today,"

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said Roska wearily. "The morrow will suffice."

"But, madam!" I said. "If these villanious wights from across the sea be but a few days' sail from our coast, should not this news take precedence over all else? As is said on my plane, one nail in the cracked board eftsoons may save ten anon."

"Speak to me of it no more, Zdim. 'Tis a misfortune that Madam Mailakis chanced in at just that time, but I *could* not entreat her rudely."

"But—"

"Now, now, Zdim darling! The subject is highly distasteful, and I would forget the whole sorry business in the pages of a book. Fetch from the library the copy of Falmas' *Love Eternal.*"

"Madam Roska!" I said. "I endeavor to give satisfaction; but—if I may speak freely—I really think you should convene your Board of Syndics forthwith. Else we may all perish, including your noble self. I should be remiss in my duties, did I not point this out to you."

"Dear Zdim! You are most thoughtful of my welfare. Awad! List the members of the Board and, after dinner, visit them. Tell them that tomorrow, at the third hour, I shall wait upon them at the Guildhall with urgent news."

At the meeting, Jimmon, the Chief Syndic, said: "Are you that demon from the Twelfth Plane that was indentured to Doctor Maldivius?"

"Aye, sir."

"What's your name? Stam or something?"

"Zdim Akh's son, sir."

"Ah, yes. Extraordinarily ugly names, you twelfth Planers have. Well, Roska, what's this all about, eh?"

"Gentlemen," she said. "You will recall that, last month, Doctor Maldivius sought to squeeze money from the Syndicate in return for news of a peril menacing Ir."

"I remember well enough," said a Syndic. "I still think it was a bluff; that he had no such news."

"You know what a slippery character Maldivius was," said another. "No wonder they made it too hot for him to stay in the city."

"Aside from all that," said Roska, "I've learnt what the menace is, and Maldivius exaggerated not."

"Oh?" said several. They were a sleepy, bored-looking lot, most of advanced years and many fat. Now they sat up and showed signs of interest.

"Aye," continued Roska. "A powerful scry stone has lately come into my hands, and my servant has seen the menace approaching. Tell them, Zdim."

I described my vision. Some looked impressed; others scoffed: "Oh, come now, you don't expect us to take the word of an inhuman monster?"

The argument raged for an hour. At last Roska said: "Has any of Your Excellencies a talent for scrying?"

"Not I!" said Jimmon. "I wouldn't touch the stuff. Too much like witchcraft."

Others echoed the sentiment until an old Syndic, clept Kormous, said he had dabbled in the occult arts in his youth.

"Then you shall come to my house instanter," quoth Roska, "whilst Master Kormous undertakes the trance and tells you what *he* sees. Belike you'll credit him."

An hour later, Kormous sat in the

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chair before the Sapphire, while the other Syndics stood around. He spoke in a muffled voice, but as he did so the skins of the others paled.

"I—see—the—Paaluan—ships," he mumbled. "They are—but a few leagues—from Chemnis. They—will make land—the morrow."

One by one, the Syndics dropped their incredulity. One said: "We must posthaste back to the Guildhall, to consider our next acture."

"No time; we'll meet here," said Jimmon. "Many we use your withdrawing room, Roska?"

As they filed into the room, Roska said: "At least, now you'll not deny me my seat on the Board on the frivolous ground of my sex."

"No such agreement was made ere you warned us," said Jimmon.

"Marry me, Roska darling," said a Syndic, "and you'll be a Syndic's wife, which gets you all the glory without the toil."

"Marry me," said another, "and I'll use my influence to get you your seat. 'Twould do no harm to have two Syndics in one family."

Another said: "I have a wife, but if the fair Roska would enter into an—ah—arrangement—"

"Shut thy gob, thou vulgar barbarian!" said Jimmon. "You know Madam Roska is the most virtuous woman in Ir. Besides, if she entered into any such arrangement, 'twere with me, who am much richer than you. Now, what about the black cannibals, eh?"

"If we hadn't paid Zolon to send its fleet north against the pirates of Algarth," said one, "their navy would make short work of the Paaluans."

"But we did pay," said Jimmon, "and the Zolonian navy did sail, and 'twere hopeless to try to recall them."

"It wouldn't have been, had you not taken so much time dickering with Malvidius," said another.

"A pox on you! I had to husband the taxpayers' money," said Jimmon. "Had I taken Maldivius' first offer, you'd have had my scalp for wasting the Republic's wealth. Besides, right or wrong, that's over and done with. The question is: what to do now?"

"Arm!" said one.

"You forget," said Jimmon, "that we sold our reserve stock of arms to get the money to pay the High Admiral of Zolon for the Algarthian expedition."

"Oh, gods!" said one. "What sort of mercenary idiots . . ."

And so it went for hours, with bitter recriminations. Each Syndic sought to cast the blame for the Republic's unpreparedness on one of the others. When the day was well spent, the Syndics decreed the instant mobilization of the militia and commanded all men not under arms to betake themselves to the manufacture of weapons. They appointed the youngest of the Syndics, a financier named Laroldo, commander-in-chief. Laroldo said:

"I am deeply sensible of the honor you do me, gentlemen, and I will try to merit your approval. First, however, may I suggest that we keep our proceedings secret until the morrow, at which time we shall publish our decrees and send a messenger to Chemnis to warn the Chemnites? I think Your Excellencies understand why." He winked at his fellow Syndics.

Madam Roska spoke up sharply: "Why the delay? Every hour is precious."

"Well, ahem," said Jimmon, "'tis

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too late in the day to do aught useful. Besides, we would fain not excite the commons; a panic in this underground city were a dreadful thing."

"Oh, fiddlesticks!" said Roska. "I know what you're up to. You mean to scour the markets and buy up all the food and other necessities, knowing that their prices will soar—especially if Ir be besieged. Shame on you, to take advantage of the people in this heartless fashion!"

"My dear Roska," said Jimmon, "you are after all a woman, even if a beautiful and accomplished one. Therefore you don't understand these things—"

"I understand well enough! I'll tell the people of your plot to forestall and engross—"

"I think you'll do nothing of the kind," said Jimmon. "This is an executive session, with full power to control the release of its proceedings. Anyone who wantonly reveals what takes place here, before official publication, can be mulcted of his entire estate in fines. And you, my dear, are much too delicate to be a scrubwoman. Do I make myself clear, eh?"

Roska burst into tears and left the room. The Syndicate adjourned, and the Syndics gathered their cloaks and swords with unseemly haste. My tendrils told me that Roska was right; that they were frantic to get to the markets and shops ere they closed and ere rumors of the invasion sent prices up.

Next day, the orders of the Syndicate were posted, and two messengers galloped off towards Chemnis. During the entire day, Ir was in a state of furious bustle. Somewhat over four thousand militiamen—all for whom arms were to be had—and the two hundred-odd Shvenish mercenaries were mustered on the flat beyond the Tower of Ardyman. They were put through a few simple drills and marched off down the road to Chemnis. They made a brave showing with banners fluttering and Laroldo the banker, in full armor, riding at their head.

Another thousand or so remained behind on the flat, being drilled by old Segovian, the drillmaster. The youths drilled with staves and brooms until proper weapons could be found for them.

Segovian was a stout bear of a man with a grizzled beard and a voice like thunder. He was the only man in Ir who gave much thought to military matters. The other Irians looked upon him as somewhat of an uncouth, bloodthirsty barbarian. They kept him on as a necessary nuisance, like firemen and collectors of waste.

For over a century, the Republic had pursued a peaceful policy towards other Novarian nations. The Syndicate, the ruling body of the merchant aristocracy, devoted itself with single-minded acuteness to the amassing of wealth. Some of these riches were judiciously spent in hiring the navy of Zolon to ward the coast. Some went in bribes to other Novarian leaders, playing one off against another and dissuading them from combining against Ir. The policy had worked well enough with other Novarians, but the Paaluans bid fair to be foes of another kidney.

V. LAROLDO THE BANKER

DURING THIS DAY of mobilization and bustle, I remained at Roska's house to help her scry. For most of the day, however, this did us little good. The Paaluan wizards had become aware

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that they were being spied upon. No sooner should we get a fix with the Sapphire than their wizards would point their magical bones and spoil the picture. Therefore we had only brief glimpses of the foe.

From time to time, we shifted our view to the port of Chemnis. We kept watching and hoping for the messengers from Ir to arrive; but, as far as we could see, the town pursued its normal business undisturbed.

Late in the day, while watching Chemnis, I sighted a cluster of black specks on the western horizon. When I told Roska about them, she groaned.

"Oh, gods!" she cried. "'Tis the man-eaters, about to descend upon the unwarned Chemnites and slaughter the lot. What delays our messengers?"

"Distance, mainly," quoth I. "Besides which, if I know you fickle Prime Planers, they're as likely as not to have stopped off at a tavern and gotten drunk. Hold! I see something else." What is it? What is it?"

"A man riding into Chemnis on a mule. Let me get a closer fix upon him. He appears old and bent, with long gray hair streaming out from under his hat; yet he lashes his beast to a canter. By the gods of Ning, it is my old master, the wizard Maldivius! Now I see him drawing rein as he passes a couple of Chemnites. He is shouting and waving his arms. Now he gallops on, to stop again and exhort the next passerby."

"At least, the Chemnites will have received some warning," said Roska. "If they believe his warning and flee at once, they may escape the stew pot."

"You Prime Planers never cease to amaze me, madam," I said. "I had opined that Doctor Maldivius was too utterly selfish to be bothered with warning anybody of doom, unless the good doctor could extract a price for his information."

"As you see, he's not an utter scoundrel. We seldom are, or utter anything else for that matter."

I continued to watch the port city. Evidently the first persons to whom Maldivius spoke disbelieved him, for they continued about their business as if nothing had happened. Little by little, however, his cries of warning began to take effect. I could see little clusters of people, standing about and gesticulating as they argued. Within an hour of the first warning, people began loading their goods into carts, or lashing them on the backs of beasts of burden, and taking the road up the Kyamos.

Less than half the townspeople had taken to the road, however, when the Paaluan fleet appeared off shore. Then terror struck. The road became jammed with hurrying townsfolk, jog-trotting and stumbling away from their city. Some went empty-handed, others with one or two treasured possessions snatched up at the last instant. I had lost track of Doctor Maldivius.

The Paaluan galleys swept into the harbor. Several drew up at unoccupied piers and quays. Paaluan soldiers dashed ashore and spread out, peering around corners as if they expected an ambush. Then whole companies disembarked, commanded by officers in feather cloaks of brilliant scarlet and yellow.

From one ship, men led down the companionway a multitude of animals unlike any I had seen. They were large creatures, big enough to carry a man in a saddle. They had slender muzzles and

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long ears, like those of an ass, but there the resemblance ended. They had short, clawed forelegs, hugely developed hindlegs, and long stiff tails. They progressed by hopping on their hindlegs, holding those tails up to balance the weight of their bodies. Altogether, they were something like the small Prime Plane beast called a rabbit, but on a huge scale.

As soon as the hopping beasts were ashore, the Paaluans who led them swung into the saddles on their backs and went bounding away, as swiftly as a horse can gallop. The last few Chemnites were just leaving the city, and the Paaluan cavalry caught up with some of these. Some simply rode down their victims and speared them with lances or hurled javelins into their bodies. Others whirled a device of cords and stones and threw it, so that it wrapped itself around the fugitives' legs and felled them to earth, where they were swiftly secured and dragged back to Chemnis.

It was now Madam Roska's turn to scry; but scarce had she obtained her fix when she screamed and covered her eyes. She became incoherent. To learn what has so terrified her, I had to go back into the trance myself.

Down another companionway from a ship came a procession of even more formidable creatures. The Paaluans had trained several score of their dragon-lizards as cavalry mounts. Since a fullgrown dragon often exceeded fifty feet in length, one could bear several riders in tandem.

The driver bestrode the reptile's neck. Behind him came six or eight others, seated in pairs on a kind of howdah. The usual complement was four archers and two spearmen. All covered their nakedness with a curious kind of jointed armor, made (I learnt later) of pieces of lacquered leather. Although not so strong as a good suit of steel, such as Othomaean knights wear, it was light and practical. Since one galley could accommodate only a small number of these lizards, the force was divided up among many ships. Because of the limitations of docking space, it took two full days to disembark the entire force, which outnumbered ours by perhaps two to one.

Meanwhile, the Paaluans already ashore spread out and occupied the deserted buildings of Chemnis. The Chemnites whom the bouncing Paaluan cavalry had caught were slain, cut up, and prepared as food by salting or smoking.

On the third day after the landing, the Paaluan army marched up the valley of the Kyamos, with mounted scouts and flankers thrown widely out to guard against surprise.

Meanwhile, Roska's house became practically an annex of the Guildhall, the Syndics coming in at all hours for news of what we had seen. Old Kormous spent many hours in the oratory, relieving Roska and me at our scrying.

At the same time, word of the invasion swiftly spread throughout the Republic. As a result, peasantry and townsfolk stampeded from the rest of the nation into Ir City, which had the repute of impregnability. Hence the city became overcrowded, with people sleeping in the subterranean streets.

At last came the day of battle. Kormous and I were both in trance, watching the Saphire from opposite

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sides of the table. We could not see much, first because of the interference of the Paaluan wizards, and secondly because of the clouds of dust.

As far as I could see, the Syndic Laroldo attempted none of those military subtleties—deceptive maneuvers and the like—that some Prime Plane nations have developed to such a pitch of artistry. He simply lined up his army, with the Shvenites around him in the center, waved his sword, and ordered them forward. Then all was lost in the dust.

It was only a fraction of an hour later, however, that we began to glimpse fugitives—Irians, not Paaluans—running madly from the battle. We saw some Irians shot or speared by the crews on the backs of the dragon-lizards, while the lizards gobbled a few. Then, as the scene shifted, I saw His Excellency Laroldo galloping eastwards. The Syndics present at this session of scrying cried aloud, beat their breasts, tore their hair, and uttered maledictions and threats against Laroldo, whom they blamed for the defeat.

THE banker-turned-soldier reached Ir a few hours later and staggered into Madam Roska's home, covered with dust and blood and with several pieces of his armor dangling by single straps. He threw the stump of his broken sword on the floor and told the assembled Syndics:

"We're beaten."

"We know that, you fool," said Jimmon. "How bad is it?"

"Total, as far as I'm concerned," said Laroldo. "The militia folded up at the first shock and ran like rabbits."

"What of the Shvenites?"

"When they saw the day was lost, they formed a hollow square and marched off, presenting a hedgehog with their pikes. The enemy let them go, preferring to chase easier prey that would not fight back."

One Syndic said: "I do notice that you saved your own precious neck. A hero would have fallen trying to rally his men."

"By Franda's golden locks! I'm no hero, merely a banker. And 'twould have done you no good for me to have fallen on the field. Since we were well outnumbered, the battle would have come out the same, and you'd not have had what little help I can give you. Had I consulted my own safety merely, I should have ridden off to Metouro. After 'tis over, an we still live, you may hang, shoot, or behead me as you list. Meanwhile, let's get on with the job." My tendrils told me that the man was sincere.

"Well said," quoth another Syndic, for much of the Syndicate's rancor against Laroldo had abated in the face of so huge a catastrophe. "But tell me, Master Laroldo, we've followed your advance by the scry stone. Why tried you not some trick maneuver—a feint or a flanking movement, for ensample? I've read how other generals have beaten superior forces by such sleights."

"They had armies of well-trained men—veterans—whereas I had a mob of tyros. Even had I known about such maneuvers, 'twas all I could do to get my gaggle of geese lined up and all moving in the same direction at once. But now, if you crave not to be fodder for the cannibals, you needs must raise a new army. Make it of boys, grandsires, slaves, and women if need

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be, and arm them with brooms and bricks if swords and arrows be lacking. For those who come against us mean to salt you and ship you back to Paalua to dine on for many a moon."

"You don't suppose we could buy them off, eh?" said Jimmon. "Our treasury flourishes."

"Not a chance. Their land is mostly desert and hence poor in pasture whereon to raise edible beasts. They crave flesh, and every so often they sally forth to other continents to get it. Nor do they care whether 'tis the flesh of men or of beasts. And so, right now, one good iron arrowhead is worth more to you than its weight in refined gold."

There was a general chorus of sighs around the circle of Syndics. Jimmon said: "Ah, well, now that it's too late, 'tis easy to see the follies of our former courses. It shall be done as Master Laroldo prescribes."

"Can't we seek for aid from one or another of the Twelve Cities?" said a Syndic.

Jimmon frowned in thought. "Tonio of Xylar is hostile because of his alliance with Govannian. We shall be lucky if he try not to join forces with the invaders."

"'Twere like one rabbit allying himself with a wolf against another rabbit," said a Syndic. "Both would end up in the wolf's gut."

"True, but try to tell King Tonio that," said Jimmon. "Govannian is hopeless for the same reason. Metouro is friendly, but their army is mobilized on the border of Govannian, to meet the threat from there. Besides which, the Faceless Five have become suspicious of their own army of late, because a revolutionary conspiracy amongst the officers has come to light. Nay, I fear no help is to be looked for thence."

"How about Solymbria?"

"Solymbria's policy of neutrality might possibly be bent—if Solymbria were not under that addlepate Gavindos."

"The gods must have meant to chastise Solymbria when they caused the lot to fall upon him," said Roska. "My bondsman Zdim were a better archon than he."

Jimmon stared at me, his eyes slits in his fat, round face. "That gives me an idea. O Zdim!"

"Aye, sir?"

"As an outlander, an indentured servant, and not even human, you are in no position to command those of this plane. Natheless, when I have heard you speak, meseemed that you made better sense than many of our wise men. What course would you suggest?"

"You ask *me*, sir?"

"Yes, yes. What would you say, eh?"

"Well, sir, I strive to give satisfaction . . ." I thought a while, during which the Syndics watched me like gamblers watching the spin of the wheel. "First of all, did I understand Master Laroldo to be a banker?"

"Aye," grunted Laroldo, who was gulping a flagon of Roska's fine wine as if it had been small beer. "None surpasses me at low interest on loans and high on deposits. Would you borrow or lend?"

"Neither, Your Excellency. But enlighten my ignorance, pray: have you in sooth had no warlike experience ere this?"

"Nay; why should I? We've been at war with no one. 'Tis usual for one Syndic to command the forces. Since I was the youngest and most active, they chose me."

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"Well, sirs, on our plane, for any enterprise where the results of error be so perilous, we prefer to choose as captain a demon with practice in that line. We have a saying, that experience is the best teacher. Is there nobody in Ir who has fought with weapons?"

A Syndic said: "There's old Segovian, the drillmaster. He would have marched with the army, but we commanded him to stay in Ir and train recruits. He's no blaze of brilliance, but at least he knows which end of a spear to poke with."

"Humph," said Jimmon. "Suppose we make Segovian commander, and he raise another militia? There ought to be enough lusty farm lads amongst the refugees who've swarmed in upon us. Then the Paaluans arrive. They can't get in against even feeble resistance, so strong our position is; but neither can we break out. No matter how lavish our supplies of food and water, they'll run short in time. What then?"

"Well, sir—" I thought some more. "You say there is plenty of money in the treasury, yes?"

"Aye."

"You hired a corps of barbarians from Shven—those tall, yellow-haired fellows—did you not?"

"The bastards deserted us," growled Laroldo.

"One can't blame them overmuch," said Jimmon. "When they saw the day was lost, why should they march back hither and put their heads in the noose by reentering the city? Go on, Zdim."

"Well then, whence came these men? I know in a general way that Shven lies beyond mountains to the north, but where exactly got you these fellows?"

"They were recruited from the Hruntings," said a Syndic.

"Where, exactly, are they?"

"The Hruntings dwell across the Ellornas from Solymbria. Their cham is Theorik son of Gondomerik."

"If," said I, "you could get a messenger to this Theorik with a promise of much gold, could he fetch back an army large enough to vanquish the Paaluans?"

"It might be worth the trying," said a Syndic.

"Hopeless," said another. "We should do better to clear out and flee to Metouro, leaving the Paaluans to loot an empty city."

Another long wrangle arose. Some were for sending an offer to the barbarian ruler. Some protested that it would cost two much, to which the first replied that all the money in the world would do them no good when they were quietly digesting in Paaluan stomachs. Some favored a general flight; they hoped that if they could not defeat the Paaluans, they could at least outrun them.

In the midst of these wrangles, in came a militiaman, crying:

"Your Excellencies! The foe is in sight!"

"In what sort?" asked Laroldo.

"Their scouts, mounted on beasts that look like huge, long-tailed rabbits, approach the wall of Ardyman's Tower."

"Well, so much for your scheme of fleeing the city," said Jimmon. "Now must we stand, to do or die. Come on, everybody: let's view these cultured cannibals."

AT THE ENTRANCE to this cave city, we found that Segovian, not waiting upon his official appointment, was already managing the defense. The main

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gate and the little portal above it had been closed and barred, and timbers had been propped against them to hold them shut.

We climbed the stairways up to the roof. The stouter Syndics went slowly, stopping to puff. At the top, we found a crowd of militiamen being ordered about by Segovian. He was placing one behind each merlon of the parapet with a bow, an arbalest, or a sling.

"Now hear this!" he roared. "Get your weapon ready to shoot, then pop out and discharge it through the crenel beside you. Linger not in the embrasure, lest you get a return shaft through your weasand, but duck back behind the merlon. No heroics, now; this is serious business. Pick your targets; waste not your missiles on the countryside—"

An arrow arched over the wall, to fall with a clatter on the flagstones. Segovian sighted the Syndics and bustled over.

"What are you fellows doing up here, without the least protection?" he yelled, unawed by his visitors' wealth and station. "Everyone up here is to wear a headpiece and a cuirass, though they be nought but boiled leather!"

Jimmon cleared his throat. "We have come to inform you, Master Segovian, that we have chosen you our commander-in-chief."

"Good of you, good of you," snapped Segovian. "Now off you go—"

"But pray, General!" said a Syndic. "At least let us catch a glimpse of those we fight against."

"Oh, very well; I suppose I can allow you that much," grumbled the new general. He hustled them about like an angry sheep dog, barking at them if they held their heads too long in the crenels.

Down below, a crowd of yelling Paaluan scouts milled about on their bouncers, as we called their mounts. (The native name is something like "kangaroo.") They shot arrows from short bows, but such was the height of Ardyman's tower that the shafts arrived with little force. Our misiles, shot from above, could have been much more effective, but our warriors' inexperience made them miss. At last a crossbow bolt struck a Paaluan, who fell from his saddle. Thereupon the rest went bouncing off to a safer distance.

A vast cloud of dust in the distance heralded the approach of the main Paaluan army. The onlookers atop Ardyman's Tower burst into cries of dismay as the dragon-lizards came in sight, swinging their limbs out and around at each stride of their lizardly, spraddle-legged gait. After them came rank upon rank of footmen, mostly pikemen and archers. They did not seem to have crossbows, which gave us some advantage.

So began the siege of Ir. Since there was now no more question of mass flight, we had either to beat the Paaluans or perish trying. At this time I thought of the Irians and myself as "we," since my fate was linked willy-nilly with theirs.

SEGOVIAN proved a surprisingly effective general, considering the material he had to work with. Within a few days, Ardyman's Tower was defended by another five thousand militiamen, even though most were armed with improvised weapons, such as hatchets and hammers. But the forges glowed and the anvils clanged day and night, slowly building up our stock of arms. Things

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like iron window gratings were melted up.

In accordance with the Syndicate's policy of enlisting all slaves and bondsmen, promising them freedom after victory, I was enrolled in the artillery. Being so much stronger than the ordinary Prime Planer, I could crank the windlass of a catapult twice as fast as a pair of them, thus doubling the engine's rate of discharge.

The Paaluans set up their camp just out of bowshot of the tower. When they had it all neatly built, Segovian ordered us to open on them with our longest-ranged catapults. The darts and stone balls we sent whistling into their camp, skewering and mashing their warriors, so galled them that after a few days they struck the whole camp and moved it back out of range.

Meantime, they extended a line of earthworks around Ardyman's Tower, up Mount Ir behind the tower and down again. The hillside gave them an advantage in archery, which they were not slow to take advantage of. They showered us with shafts, shot from a height equal to our own, until Segovian erected a set of massive leathern awnings, like sails, along the parapet on that side to catch the arrows as they slanted down upon us. The Paaluan wizarads sent illusions in the form of gigantic bats and birds swooping at our battlements, but our men learnt to ignore them.

The Syndicate sent out a messenger to go to Metouro for help. The man was lowered by a rope from the tower on a moonless night and tried to steal through the hostile lines. The next day, the sun arose to show the messenger tied to a stake in front of the camp. The Paaluans spent the day in putting the man to death with exquisite refinements.

A second messenger, commanded to try to break through to Solymbria, fared likewise. After that, it became hard to find volunteers for such missions.

The Paaluans began to build a catapult of their own, felling trees in the neighborhood for their timber. Their engine was a mighty one with a long, counterweighted boom. Segovian studied their progress through a spyglass. This was the only such instrument in Ir, since it was a new invention recently made in the far southern city of Iraz. Segovian muttered:

"Methinks I see a light-skinned fellow directing that crew. That explains how these folk, who were never known to use catapults before, can do so now. One of our Novarian engineers has gone over to them. If I ever catch the losel . . ."

I could not quite hear what it was that Segovian would do to the renegade engineer, but perhaps that was just as well. He went on:

"They're lining that thing up with our main mirror. Doubtless they seek to smash it, which would plunge our city in darkness save what light the lamps and candles can furnish. And the supply of those won't last for ay."

Luckily for us, the Paaluans—or their Novarian engineer—were not the most expert catapult builders. The first time they cranked up the device and let fly, one of the uprights holding the shaft on which the boom turned broke with a tremendous crash. Timbers from the wrecked machine flew hither and yon, slaying several Paaluans.

They began construction of a second and sturdier engine. Segovian called

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several hundred of his troops together and asked for volunteers to make a sortie and destroy this machine. When I was a little bashful about raising my hand, Segovian said:

"O Zdim, we need your strength and toughness of hide. You are fain to volunteer, are you not?"

"Well—" said I, but Segovian continued:

"That's fine. Have you practiced with the hand weapons of this plane?"

"Nay, sir; it has not been demanded of me—"

"Then learn. Sergeant Chavral, take Artilleryman Zdim and try him out with various weapons, to see which one suits his talents."

I went with Chavral to the courtyard of Ardyman's Tower. The courtyard had been converted to a training ground, since there was no room inside Ir for such activities. The place was crowded. One section was cordoned off for an archery range; another was used as a drill ground.

Chavral took me to the section where several thick wooden posts had been set up. The wielders of swords and axes tried their blows on these. In an adjacent space, pairs of fighters, heavily padded, fought each other with blunted weapons, while another sergeant barked commands and criticisms at them.

Chavral handed me a broadsword. "Take a good swing at yonder pell," he said, pointing to one of the posts.

"Like this, sir?" I said, and swung. The blade bit deeply into the scarred wood and broke at the hilt, leaving me staring at the hilt in my hand.

Chavral frowned. "That must have been a flawed blade. A lot of this stuff is turned out in haste by amateur smiths. Here, try this one."

I took the second blade and swung again. Again the blade broke.

"By Astis' coynte, you know not your own strength!" cried Chavral. "We needs must find you a stouter armature." After some examination of weapons, he handed me a mace. This was a mighty club, with an iron shaft and a head that bristled with spikes.

"Now smite the pell with that ballow!" he commanded.

I did. This time the post broke, and the broken-off part bounded end over end across the drill yard.

"Now you need some practice in giving and parrying blows," he said. "Don this suit of padding, and I will do likewise."

Chavral lectured me on how to hold one's shield, how to feint, parry, circle, advance, retreat, duck, leap over a low swing, and so on.

"Now let's fight!" he said. "Two out of three knocks on the head or body win the bout."

We squared off with shields and padded clubs, weighted so that they did not much differ in heft from my iron mace. Chavral feinted and got a solid blow in against my helmet. He grinned through the bars of his helm.

"Come on, hit me!" he cried. "Art asleep? Art afraid?"

I feinted as I had seen him do and then aimed a forehand blow at his head. He got his shield up in time to catch it, but the wooden frame of the shield cracked under the blow, leaving the shield stove in. Chavral, suddenly pale, staggered back and dropped his shield.

"By Heryx's iron yard, I think you've broken my arm!" he groaned. "You there, run fetch a chirurgeon! Wine, somebody!"

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He emitted a yell as the chirurgeon set his cracked bone. To me he said: "You idiot, now I shall have to fight with my arm in a sling for a month!"

I said: "I am sorry, sir; I did but strive to follow your commands. As we demons say, to err is the common lot of sentient beings."

Chavral sighed. "I suppose I should not be wroth with you for that. But hereafter, O Zdim, methinks you had better practice by yourself, lest you lay all our warriors low with your lovetaps. You need not concern yourself overmuch with the niceties of fence, for one stout blow apiece ought to do for any foeman you encounter!"

THE NEXT cloudy night, the storming party stole down the spiral ramp outside the tower. We wore soft slippers to move silently, and leathern defenses only, because of the noise of metal armor. We bore our weapons in our hands, without scabbards, lest they rattle.

Arrived at the Paaluan ditch, we tossed mattresses, confiscated from the citizens of Ir, into the ditch and had it wellnigh filled ere the foe discovered us. Then we placed a score of short ladders against their stockade and swarmed over while they were still scattered, running hither and thither and shouting the alarm.

Once over the stockade, we rushed the new catapult and piled oil-soaked fascines upon and around it. Some had brought covered buckets filled with hot coals, which they now uncovered and emptied on the fascines. In a trice the thing was blazing merrily.

Meanwhile, the Paaluans rallied. Several knots of them, each led by an officer, rushed at us out of the dark. I followed Chavral's advice, confronting one cannibal after another. As each came at me, I caught his first blow or thrust on my shield and hit him a solid smack with my mace. Sometimes, but not often, a second blow was needed.

Between the feebleness of the Prime Planers and the fact that they are half blind at night, they presented no tough problems, so long as I took care that one did not come at me from the side or rear while I was engaged with another in front. I was blithefully smashing skulls and staving in ribs when I heard a trumpet blow the recall. One of my fellow Irians pulled me by the arm.

"Come on, Zdim!" he shrieked over the hubub. "You can't fight the whole army by yourself!"

I ran after the rest. At the stockade, a few Paaluans strove to keep us from recrossing. I ran down the line and smashed them one by one. Then we were running back to the tower and up the spiral stair.

When Segovian lined us up and called the roll, six or seven were missing. They told me that this was not a severe loss, considering the size of the force opposed to us; but we could ill spare any man.

The Paaluans tried to put out the fire, but the effort was hopeless. After the ashes had cooled, they began a third catapult. This time, however, they surrounded the site with a trench, a stockade, and a line of "antlers," made by whittling tree branches to many points and sinking their butts in the earth. They also mounted a heavy guard over their engine.

IF NONE could get out of Ir, one natheless got in. The guard was aroused one dawn by pounding on the small up-

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per portal. Looking over the battlement, they saw a stocky, hairy, naked figure, obviously not a Paaluan. They let him in and brought him before the Syndicate. I was at Roska's, preparing to go forth on my daily duty with the catapults, when a messenger came for me.

When I entered the Guildhall, a hoarse voice cried: "Zdim!" and I was hugged and pounded by my old friend, the ape man Ungah from Bagardo's carnival.

"By all the gods of Ning, what do you here?" I asked.

"Was telling these men. When we were auctioned, yeoman named Olvis bought me. Was swinking for him when word came of the invasion. Master Olvis loaded family and self into his cart and set off for Metouro. Told me to save myself; no room in carriage.

"Set out on the same path, but along came troop of Paaluan scouts on bouncers. Ran, but not fast enough, and they caught me with whirl-balls. Threw net over me. Dragged me over stones and through mud to their camp. Would have salted me away, but their wise men had never seen a person like me. Decided to keep me alive to learn what they could."

"How got you loose?"

Ungah bared his huge yellow teeth. "Chewed my bonds. You hairless ones—not you, Zdim, but these others—have weak jaws and teeth. Strangled guard outside the tent and came away. Wasn't hard. Was brought up on hunting.

"Made one mistake. Got turned around and found self inside ring of besiegers. The camp was stirring, so I dared not try to get back out. Was telling boss men here why their spies are always caught."

"Why?"

"Smell. Paaluans have dragon-lizards trained to pick up smells. A smaller kind, and guards march about the camp with 'em on a leash, waggling long tongues they smell with." A strange look came into Ungah's face, and his little, deep-set eyes opened wide. "By Zevatas' golden whiskers, just thought of something! Remember how the dragon-lizard in the carnival loved you? I think, because you smell like reptile yourself."

"Oh, come!" I protested. "I see not why. I keep myself scrupulously clean—"

"Natheless, can smell you a dozen paces away. Novarians can't smell or else are too polite to say you stink. But you do."

"So do all Prime Planers," I said, "but I haven't complained."

"No offense," said Ungah. "Just pointed out, one creature's perfume is another's stink. Yours like lizards'."

"Well, so what? I could hardly charm all the dragons in the Paaluan army."

"No, but can wriggle through camp and away. If a lizard smelt you, he'd think you were lizard, too."

The Syndicate argued the proposal for hours. These Prime Planers are the greatest talkers in a hundred universes. Some embraced Ungah's proposal, but one protested:

"Nay; the demon owes us no loyalty. He'll abscond as soon as he gets through the besiegers. That is what I should do."

"Or," said another, "he may even go over to the foe."

"Speak for yourselves," said Jimmon. "As for his loyalty, have you so soon forgotten the night of the raid on

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the catapult, when Zdim smote down more cannibals than all the rest of our party together, eh?"

"Without questioning Master Zdim's character," said another, "meseems that Master Ungah were a worthier messenger, what of his youth as a wild hunter. Besides, he's been through the camp once and knows it better than any other wight in Ir."

"We should have to make it worth his while to carry a message," said another.

"In any case," said another, "we must not shilly-shally for ay. The supply of food and water will not suffice so long as we had hoped, for the influx of refugees has put an unwonted burthen upon it. . ."

In the end, they voted to ask Madam Roska to command me to undertake a mission to Solymbria, and to ask Ungah at the same time to depart on one to Metouro. They promised him not only freedom but also a generous fee, if he and they both survived.

"I always strive to give satisfaction, gentlemen," I said. "When do we depart? Tonight? Soonest begun, soonest done, as we demons express it."

"Not quite yet," said Jimmon. "We must decide how much to offer the other Novarians and the barbarians for their help. Let's see, how many of the foe face us?"

"About seven thousand, as nearly as I can estimate," said Laroldo.

"Then we should ask a relief force of at least equal strength. . ." said another Syndic. Thus began an argument that raged for hours, touching upon such matters as the number of troops required, the proper daily pay for a mercenary, and the probable length of the campaign. Some Syndics were ever trying to trim the amount to be offered, on the ground that they must think of the prosperity of Ir after the defeat of the invaders; others, to raise it, on the ground that the money would do them no good if help could not be had.

At last a compromise was reached. I was to offer one Irian mark per man per day, plus sixpence a day for each mammoth, with a maximum of a quarter-million marks.

VI. AITHOR OF THE WOODS

THE NIGHT was as dark as the underside of a boulder—as we say in Ning—when Ungah and I were lowered in slings from the battlements of Ardyman's Tower in a drizzling rain. Segovian did not wish to open even the small upper portal, lest sound and movement draw the foe's regard. To be less visible, I turned from my normal slate-gray to black.

At the base of the tower, Ungah gave my arm a hasty squeeze and melted into the night to southward. I skulked around the tower and reached the ditch on the northern side. I sprang down into the fosse and up the far side, such a leap being nothing to a Twelfth Planer.

I paused with my ear to the stockade until I heard the tramp of a Paaluan sentry. Waiting until this sound had died away, I dug my claws into the wood of the palings and crept up and over, moving slowly like some sluggish insect.

Inside, all was quiet. The sentry had vanished. I threaded my way across the space between the inner and outer defenses, weaving between piles of equipment. The outer defenses were only a shoulder-high embankment, with enough of a ditch before it to pro-

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vide the earth for the embankment.

I almost stumbled across another Paaluan sentry, sitting asleep with his back to one of the piles. With my superior night vision, I had easily seen him had I not come upon him suddenly on rounding a corner.

I could have slain him with a tap of my mace, but attached by a thong to one wrist was one of the smaller dragon-lizards used to smell out foes. As I checked myself, this reptile raised itself on all fours and shot out a long, forked tongue.

I stood as still as a statue, with my skin as black as I could make it. The lizard took a step towards me and ran the tip of its tongue up the shin of my leg. It did this several times, as if it liked me—or at least my smell.

I could not stand there until dawn, being licked by this affectionate dragon. When the creature failed to subside, I began to steal away. The dragon, however, tried to follow me. Its leash pulled on the wrist of the sleeping sentry and woke him. He stared at me and scrambled to his feet with a wild yell.

I hesitated, wondering whether to spring back and slay him or start running. I was trained in reason and logic on my own plane, but reason and logic are of small avail when one must instantly make up one's mind.

An answering shout made up my mind for me. If the alarm had already been given, it would do no good to pause to destroy this one sentry. The delay might, in fact, prove fatal to me as well.

So I sprang over the embankment, leaped the ditch, and sped north. The camp awoke with an angry buzz, as of the nests of certain stinging Prime Plane insects when disturbed. Presently, several Paaluan scouts rode forth on their bouncers, holding torches aloft. The bounding gait of these mounts caused the torches to leave fiery tracks in the dark, like the arches of a bridge across a river.

Both Prime Planers and bouncers, however, are half blind at night. With my nocturnal vision, I had little trouble in avoiding their blundering dashes. As we demons put it, well begun is half done.

THE COUNTRYSIDE north of Ir City was almost deserted. Most of the countryfolk who had not taken refuge in Ir City had fled to Metouro or to Solymbria. The few who did not get away in time had been caught and salted down for future consumption.

I ran all night and most of the next day. In my wallet I had a small map, showing the main roads between Ir and the Ellorna Mountains. In general, though, I ignored the roads and kept as straight a course to northward as I could. I reasoned that Paaluan scouts were more likely to be met on the roads than in the backlands.

Hence I had to scramble over rocky hills, wade through swamps, and push through thickets. These probably cost me all the time I should otherwise have saved by traveling in a straight line. On the other hand, I did not meet any Paaluans.

The obstacles slowed me far less than they would have hampered one of these feeble Prime Planers, who can scarcely run up a steep hill for a few bowshots without having to halt and gasp for breath. Still, whereas we demons are stronger than Prime Planers, we cannot keep up such a pace forever. We must

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stop betimes, consume a substantial meal, and go into digestive torpor.

At the end of the second day, I came upon a stray sheep, which had so far eluded the Paaluan foragers. I ran the creature down and spent most of the following night devouring it. When I had finished, there was little left besides its skin and bones. I fear my act violated Hwor's injunction to obey the rules of the Prime Plane; but, as they say, necessity knows no law.

Then I took my torpor. I slept all that day, and the following night. When I awoke, I was astonished to see that the sun was lower in the east than when I went to sleep, until I realized that a day and a night had elapsed.

Not wishing to be so delayed again and still swagbellied from eating the sheep, I bethought me of other means of transport. If I could ride a horse, for instance, I could reach Solymbria City in one long ride, pausing only when necessary to rest and graze the beast. According to my map, I should soon cross the Solymbrian border.

I cast my eye over hill and dale for a horse. Sure enough, I found one, a stray like the sheep, cropping grass in a dell. It wore a bridle but no saddle.

Having seen Prime Planers ride, I had some idea of how it was done but no practical experience at equitation. On the Twelfth Plane, the animals used for carrying loads are more like those the Prime Planers call tortoises. They plod sedately along, requiring only a modicum of skill to start, guide, and stop. The Prime Plane horse is something else. But, as the saying is, we know not what we can do until we try.

I started towards this horse, slowly and quietly so as not to alarm the creature. I changed my color to match that of the grass. The horse, however, saw me coming. It rolled an apprehensive eye and trotted off.

I increased my pace, but the horse only trotted faster. I ran; the horse broke into a canter. I ran faster; the horse galloped. I slowed; the horse slowed and presently returned to its grass.

For hours that day I trailed that wretched beast without getting any closer. I bethought me that at least I ought to herd it northwards, towards my ultimate destination, so that the time should not be utterly wasted.

When the sun was low in the west, the horse at last showed signs of fatigue. It was slower in starting away as I approached. By approaching it downwind so that it should not catch my unfamiliar smell, I got close enough for a sudden dash, while its head was down feeding, and leaped upon its back. I closed my legs about its barrel as I had seen Prime Planers do, grasped two handfulls of mane, and hung on.

The instant I landed upon that horse, the creature went wild. It put its head down and began making short, stiff-legged jumps, bounding alternately to right and to left and circling. At the third jump, my grip was torn loose. I flew through the air and crashed into a shrub, with enough force to have slain a Prime Planer outright.

Freed of its rider, the horse galloped off. I dragged myself out of the bush and ran after it. By the time the sun was low, I had caught up once more with the beast, which stood with hanging head and heaving sides.

It took several stalks to get close enough to essay another leap, but I did it. This time I not only wrapped my legs about the animal's body but also clung

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to its neck with both arms. The horse again went into its buck-dance, but I clung with more success. That is to say, I did not lose the grip of my legs until its fifth jump. Although cast loose in that quarter, I still clung to its neck. The result was that, as I was hurled through the air, I gave its neck a terrific twist. Hence it lost its balance and fell, partly on top of me.

I clung to the animal's neck. As it made gasping efforts to breathe, I realized that my grip was shutting off its windpipe. Soon it became quiet, and I was able to seize the bridle.

Since its ribs still heaved, I knew that I had not choked the horse to death. In fact, it presently rolled to its feet and tried to back away, dragging me through dust and grass after it. I took several nasty knocks from its fore hooves, and it also bit me in the arm. At that, I slapped it hard enough to jar it.

The struggle continued until darkness fell, albeit both contestants neared the limits of their endurance. In the end, the horse was willing to stand quietly and to follow me when I led it about by its bridle. I tethered the bridle firmly to a stout, low branch of a nearby tree and lay down to rest. The horse, I thought, would also need a rest. Moreover, I did not wish to ride it at night, fearing that it would blunder over a cliff or into a slough in the dark.

THE NEXT DAY, I began to see signs of human life: unburnt farmsteads with smoke issuing from their chimneys, and a village or two. When I rode the horse into a village, however, the first Prime Planer to sight me let out a terrified scream.

"The cannibals! The cannibals are coming!" he shouted, running down the main street and flapping his arms like a bird about to take flight. In a trice, all the other folk were running or riding madly away in all directions. I called after them:

"Hold! Come back! Fear not! I am a messenger for the Syndicate!"

But they only ran the harder. When all had vanished, I helped myself to some food I found in a shop and rode on.

Where the road crossed the Solymbrian border, I found a customs house and, on a nearby hill, a watch tower, but both were deserted. I carried ambassadorial credentials to get me past Solymbrian soldiers and officials. I had been told to present these documents to the border post before passing on into the archonate, but there was nobody to present them to.

It took me some time to think this matter out. Should I settle down here to await the return of the missing guardians? No, I thought; Ir might fall whilst I dallied. At last I thought: hearing rumors of the invasion, the guardians may have fled to Solymbria City. The best way to carry out my orders were therefore to follow them thither. So I rode on, troubled natheless because I was not obeying my orders in an exact and literal way. On my home plane, we do not give such slipshod commands.

AFTER CROSSING the border, the road to Solymbria City winds through a dense forest, mostly of ancient oaks. This woodland, called the Green Forest, is one of the few truly wild areas left in Novaria, where most of the land has been turned into farm, pasture, and city. In the Green Forest roam deer and

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boar, leopard and wolf and bear.

I saw none of these beasts, however. What did befall me was as follows. I was jogging along and thinking how much more sensibly we demons manage things on the Twelfth Plane, when two men stepped out of stands of dense forest on either hand, whirling ropes with large nooses on their ends.

The one on the left cast his noose at my horse's head. Seeing the circle of rope whirling towards him, the horse gave a startled leap to the right. Unprepared for such a bound, I lost my hold and flew through the air. I came down on my head on a stone.

I know not how long I lay unconscious. It seemed but a wink; but, when I strove in a dazed way to get up, more men had swarmed out of the foliage and seized my horse. When I attempted to rise, I found that they had bound my wrists behind my back and had tightered nooses around my arms and neck.

I made one effort to burst the bonds that bound my wrists, but my captors had done their work too well. Since my senses still swam from the knock I had received, I thought it better to defer attempts to flee until I learnt somewhat of my captors and their purpose. Besides, two of them kept cocked crossbows trained upon me. All were armed and roughly clad.

"Ho, by Heryx's iron yard! What's this we have caught?" said a voice. The speaker, a big man with a curly mop of brown hair and beard turning gray, spoke Novarian, but in an unfamiliar dialect.

"A Paaluan cannibal!" said one. "Slay him!"

"You are misinformed, sirs," I said. "I am no Paaluan; merely a demon in the service of the Irian Syndicate."

"A likely story!" said the man who had spoken. "Just the thing one of those ronyons would think up. We'd best slay him in any case. If he be a Paaluan, it serves him right; if he be a demon, he were no loss."

"Me thinks the pilgarlic's right," said another. "Paaluans are said to be human, even if they have inhuman customs."

"Oh, shut thy gob, Nikko!" said the first speaker. "You're always gainsaying—"

"Like the nine hells I will!" cried Nikko. "When I hear nonsense, I name it as such—"

"Shut up, both of you!" roared the big, curly-haired man. "Ye, Nikko, and ye, Karmelion! If ye two brabble again, by Astis' teats I'll swinge you both! Now, methinks Nikko's right; at least, I've never heard of Paaluans' having tails and scales. Come along, O demon." He started to lead the party off into the forest. "Put another lasso on him; he may be stronger than he looks."

"More likely, he'll vanish back to his own plane and then return invisibly to murther us all," grumbled Karmelion.

They led me and my horse along a scarely visible trail through the forest. The leader turned back to ask: "By the way, demon—"

"My name is Zdim, if you please, sir."

"Very well, then, Zdim, where did you ever learn to ride?"

"I taught myself, the past two days."

"I might have guessed it, for seldom have I seen a more awkward horseman. I watched you for a bowshot ere my lads snared you. Know you not that to saw on the reins as you do will ruin a

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horse's mouth?"

"Nay, good my sir; I have not had the benefit of your advice."

"Well, 'tis a marvel that you manage as well as you do—without a saddle, too. You say you're on a mission from Ir?"

"Aye," I said, and told him of the siege. I added: "And now may I take the liberty of asking who you gentlemen are, and why you detain me?"

The big man grinned. "You might call us social reformers. We do take from the rich and give to the poor. As for me, you may call me Aithor."

"I see, Master Aithor," said I, realizing that I had fallen among robbers. "Taking from the rich I can understand, but on what logic do you give to the poor?"

Aithor gave a rumbling laugh. "As to that, 'tis simple. We be the poorest folk beknownst to us, so naturally we give ourselves first place in this distribution. By the time our bare necessities are met, there's never a surplus for wider charity."

"You do not surprise me, considering what I have seen of the Prime Plane. And now, what mean you to do with me?"

"That remains to be seen, good my demon. If Ir weren't under siege, we'd send a demand for ransom thither."

"What if the Syndics refused to pay?"

He grinned again. "We have ways; we have ways. Forsooth, ye shall soon see one of them."

Another hour of winding amidst the ancient oaks brought us nigh to the robbers' camp. Aithor gave a peculiar whistle, which was answered by sentries in trees. Then we marched on into the camp, which comprised a rough circle of tents and huts around a clearing. Here were two score more of robbers, together with a number of ragged women and children.

There was much chatter between those who had captured me and those who had stayed in the camp. Much of it I could not follow by reason of the Solymbrian dialect. I was securely tethered to a tree, to which another man was also tied. This was a stout man in rich clothing, now the worse for wear.

The man shrank away from me, being unused to one of my looks. I said: "Fear not, good my sir. I am a captive like yourself."

"You—you talk?" said the man.

"You hear me, do you not?" I told him briefly who I was and the purpose of my mission. "To whom have I the pleasure of speaking, sir?"

"At least, you have good manners for an inhuman monster," said the stout man. "I am Euryllus, a merchant of Solymbria, kidnapped from an inn in a village not far hence. Said your captors nought of my ransom?"

"Not that I heard. Should they have?"

"They set forth to meet the messenger who was to have fetched it from Solymbria, but they seem to have caught you instead. Ah, woe! If the money have not arrived, I fear for myself."

"What will they do? If they slay you, they end all chances of getting their booty."

"They have a nasty habit of sending the captive home a little piece at a time, to remind his kin and associates of his plight."

"Gods of Ning!"

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"Oh, plague!" exclaimed Euryllus. "Here comes Aithor now."

The curly-haired one stood before us, massive fists on hips. "Well, sirrah," he addressed Euryllus, "your man failed to arrive, albeit we gave him two hours' leeway. Ye know what happens next."

Euryllus fell to his knees, crying: "Oh, I beseech you, good, kind captain! Give my kinsmen another day! Do not mutilate me! Do not. . ." On and on he went, weeping and babbling.

Aithor gave a sign to his men, who roughly hauled Euryllus to his feet, unleashed him, and dragged him across the clearing to a stump. They pulled off his right boot and the sock beneath it and forced his bare foot up on the stump. Then a robber smote off Euryllus' big toe with a hatchet. Euryllus shrieked.

Presently he was back at the tree with his foot wrapped in bloody bandages. Ignoring his blubbering, Aithor said:

"Your toe shall go post-haste to your home. An we receive no reply in a sennight, some other part shall be forwarded as a reminder. When ye run short of detachable parts, we shall send your head, to show that we mean business.

"Now then, Master Zdim, yeu seem to fall into a special category. Ye shall dine with me this even and tell me more of yourself and your mission."

WHEN THE TIME CAME, I was unleashed and tethered to another tree, near the hut of withes and bark that served Aithor as home. A guard stood behind me with a crossbow. Two women served us. I understood that Aithor was mate to both women, although most Novarians wed only in pairs, one man to one woman.

Aithor played the gracious host, plying me with good Solymbrian ale. My tendrils, however, picked up emanations that told me his geniality was but a veneer concealing a seething mass of hostile and violent emotions. I was by this time becoming fairly adept at interpreting the emotional radiations of Prime Planers. As the saying goes, appearances are deceptive.

Seeing no good reason to deceive him, I freely answered Aithor's questions. At length he shook his head, saying:

"I see not how to profit from your presence here. I cannot get word through the siege to your masters. If ye fail in your mission, there will be no Ir to pay ransom; if ye succeed, ye needs must be out of my grasp."

"I can promise you to ask the Syndicate to pay you after the war is won—"

"My dear demon, do I really look as simple as all that?"

"Well then, sir, what think you of my chances of success, if you release me? The Solymbrians seem to take me for a Paaluan."

"There's a muchel of ignorant wights in any land. About those tawny-haired barbarians beyond the mountains I know nought; but as far as Solymbria is concerned, your failure is as certain as the fact that water runs downhill."

"Why so?"

"Because, at the last election, the gods loaded the dice against Solymbria and gave us a government of clotpates."

"How does this election work?"

Aithor belched and slapped his paunch. "Know, demon, that we Solymbrians be a very pious folk. Centuries ago, the holy fathers determined that, since the gods manage

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all, the only logical way of choosing our rulers was by lot. The gods, y'see, would determine the outcome and, loving the ancient and holy polis of Solymbria, would make the lot fall to the worthiest.

"So, every year, there's a grand festival in honor of Zevatas and to our own special godlet, Immur the Compassionate. The climax is a drawing of lots. The names of an hundred Solymbrians, taken in order from the census list of citizens, are written on slips of reed paper and inclosed in nutshells. The shells are dropped into a sacred bag and shaken up. Then, before all the people, the high priest of Immur draws one nut from the bag, and he whose name is inclosed therein becomes the next year's Archon. The second name drawn becomes the First Secretary; the third becomes Censor, and so on until all the high offices of state have been filled.

"I would not be thought guilty of impiety," said Aithor with a grin, "but I must confess that the gods have sometimes made very odd choices."

"But," I said, "everyone knows that, amongst Prime Planers, some are wise and some fools—"

"Hush, Master Zdim, if ye'd not be guilty of sacrilege! For 'tis another of our sacred principles that all men are created equal and are therefore equally fitted for statecraft. The great reformer, Psoanes the Just, made this plain when he overthrew the feudal regime. For, as he argued with irrefutable logic, if some were naturally abler and more sapient than others, that were unfair to the stupid and foolish. The gods would be guilty of permiting an unjust and inequitable state of affairs to persist amongst men. But this were unthinkable, since all men know the gods to be all-wise and all-good and to intend the well-being of mankind."

"We have some pretty silly gods on my Twelfth Plane," quoth I, "but perhaps things are different in this world."

"No doubt, no doubt. Anyway, the office of Archon fell this time upon one Gavindos of Odrum, a wrestler by trade. Now that he's been in office for most of a year, the results are evident. Did ye encounter any guards at the border?"

"Nay, and that puzzled me. I had been told to expect them and had been given documents—those your men took from me—to identify myself."

Aithor: "Since none has been paid for months, they have simply deserted their posts rather than stay and starve. The rest of the Archonate is in a similar pass. Of course, such a state of affairs is not without its advantages to my merry men and me, for we need not fear soldiers and constables drawing cordons through the greenwood to entrap us. In fact, we are thinking of seizing some neighboring town and making ourselves rulers thereof. The greenwood is all very fine in summer, but in winter we long for warm hearths and solid roofs against the rain and sleet."

"Do no Solymbrians protest this condition?" I asked.

"Oh, aye, there's some grumbling. Some say the gods chose Gavindos to punish Solymbria for the sins of its people.

"What sins?"

Aithor shrugged. "To me, they have been no more sinful of late than men are everywhere and everywhen; but that's what is said in explication. Others say that, even if Gavindos and

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his helpers be fools, 'tis only fair to give the stupid a chance at the government, lest the clever exploit them without mercy and without end."

"I thought you said no Solymbrians believed that some men were stupider than others?"

"Nay, messire demon, that't not what I said. Psoanes taught that all men are *created* equal, but that the differences in their subsequent lives modified them, so that some ended up wiser than others. The cure, then, were to assure everyone an upbringing of the same degree of benignity. But this, none of our rulers has been able to effect. Parents differ at the outset and therefore impose differences upon their offspring."

"Meseems the only alternative were to rear all infants in public institutions, then?"

"One archon tried that, years ago; but the scheme aroused such opposition that the next archon rescinded the plan. In any event, the contingencies of chance perpetually disturb the pattern, raising one and casting down another without regard to his merits." Aithor scratched, doubtless being plagued by the parasitic insects of this world. "I must own to a certain skepticism about this official theory, since my brother and I, brought up in the same way be the same parents, have turned out as different as fish and fowl. He's a minor priest of Immur, as correct as a mathematical diagram; whereas I—I am Aithor of the Woods. . ."

The garrulous chieftain rambled on about anecdotes in his own career to illustrate the points he had made. When I got a chance to speak, I said:

"Master Aithor, if your government be of no avail to us of Ir, you have several score of lusty rogues here, who might be made into a formidable force of soldiery."

Aithor guffawed. "Be ye proposing to enlist *us* in your campaign?"

"Aye, sir."

"Nay, nay; no governmental employment for us, thank you! Besides, an we put ourselves in the hands of officials, they'd use us to raise your siege and then hang the lot of us when we were no longer useful. I've known such things to happen."

"You were speaking of seizing a town and making yourself its government."

"That's different. Were I lord of a town and its environs, recognized as such by by peers in government, I might feel differently. But such is not now the case."

"If the Paaluans capture Ir, the next place they'll invade is Solymbria. Its present weakness invites attack, does it not?"

Aithor: "Well, and so what?"

"They'd overrun your Green Forest and flush you out."

"I think not. We know this greenwood like the palms of our hands. They're desert folk, from what I hear, and 'twere child's play to mislead and entrap them amidst our wildwood."

"Would you not help to save the rest of your native land from devastation? Meseems that love of one's country is one of the few emotions that persuades Prime Planers betimes to put the general good ahead of their own advantage."

"Why should we? Half of us would perish in the struggle, and —as I've reminded you—the rest would be slain afterwards on trumped-up charges. No, thank you. Others may risk their hides for their native land, even though she

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have ground them down and cast them out; but not Aithor of the Woods."

"But think! If Solymbria be devastated, what will be left for your band to prey upon?"

He chuckled. "O most sapient argufier! By Astis' pretty pink teats, Master Zdim, ye should have been a professor in the Academy at Othomae. Well, I'll tell you. We have amongst our booty a muchel of fair raiment, more suited to the person of an ambassador than a naked, scaly hide. Since it is of little use to us here, I'll accouter you properly for your mission and dispatch you on the morrow. How's that?"

"Very fine, sir—"

An outburst of yelling interrupted me. Two robbers—the same Nikko and Karmelion who had quarreled before—were going for each other with knives. Aithor leaped to his feet with a blazing oath and strode across the clearing. The chieftain's demeanor had changed alarmingly. He roared like a lion, and the veins in his temples stood out in the firelight.

He seized the two disputants, one with each hand. Nikko he hurled into a cooking fire; Karmelion he slammed into a tree trunk with such force as to stun the man. When Nikko bounded out of the fire, scattering coals and beating at the burning spots on his garments, Aithor felled him with a buffet.

"By Heryx's iron yard!" he thundered. "I warned you varlets. Lash them to trees!"

When this had been done, Aithor took a heavy whip and, roaring and cursing, flogged these men's bare backs until their flesh hung in bloody shreds. Whenever he fetched a particularly loud shriek from one, he answered it with a bellowing laugh. He ceased only when both men had swooned and even his mighty arm faltered with fatigue.

When he came back to where I was tethered, he shouted for more ale. I began a question: "Sir, if I may be permitted—"

But Aithor bellowed: "Get out, lizard-man! Count yourself lucky that I visit not the same treatment on you. Get back to your proper tree and pester me not!"

—TO BE CONCLUDED—

—L. SPRAGUE DE CAMP

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DARK OF THE STORM

Vincent Perkins is a young Canadian who says of this story (his first sale), "I took a mythological legend, wove into it humanistic figures and wrote it into a science-fiction background"...

VINCENT PERKINS

Illustrated by BILLY GRAHAM

GREY DOOM CLOUDS dappled the fields of the skies as Pegasus winged his way high above the shadowing plains. Scenting the nearness of water, he lowered his left wing and banked smoothly, his legs tucked in to his snow white belly so as to give him more stability. The currents of the air were cool figures along his cheek as he searched the mossed banks of the Eridanus for a sure landing space. Spotting one, he readied his hoofs and glided down to alight easily on the grassy ground.

The wind from the south lifted his elegant mane, sifting the fine hairs as a wandering child spreads harvest grain.

Pegasus crouched on his knees and put his head near the surface of the water, his lean tongue licking the moisture into his parched throat.

Satisfied, he lifted his head, raised himself into a standing position and looked about. The breeze wafted the faint smell of a cooking fire to his sensitive nostrils.

He leapt and sprang up into the air, his strong wings beating steadily to gain him the heights once more.

Yes, there was something in the air. Pegasus could see the signs in the way the clouds billowed menacingly, the way the warming rays of the sun failed to find their way through the barrier of cumulus, the way the wind changed from smooth to harsh, warm to cold in the split second before he spotted the lone cabin resting silently on the crest of the hill.

The connection was very plain. Somehow, the lonely cabin was aligned with the threat of the approaching storm in such a way as to make Pegasus shiver instinctively. Still—

A warning would suffice.

The sleek stallion spread his glossy wings and stilled their motion slide downward on the buffeting winds. The light grey smoke wisped upward from the blackened chimney, forming dusty clouds, then dispersing in the wind.

He flapped his wings furiously for a single moment and touched down gracefully on the sandy exposure fronting the hutch. He scratched up a film of dust with his hoof and the grains slowly settled back into place. He

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snorted once, neighed impatiently.

The slatted door squeaked open. For a single instant Pegasus could see a dark interior fitted with the usual furniture and applicances, then the noble figure of a man blocked his view. He stepped out into the sunlight, the dimming rays making his bronze skin glisten like a polished golden goblet. He hefted a strange looking device in his right hand, and brought it up to point at the horse.

"What do you want, coming around here?" A voice like sand being spilled through a copper drainpipe.

Pegasus snorted again, pointed his nose at the rain clouds riding the crest of the storm. Then he turned back to the man and ruffled his wings, shaking out the heat gathering beneath the feathers.

The man turned his gaze on the clustering clouds, leaned his rifle against the side of the hut and looked at Pegasus. He saw the horse eyeing the weapon suspiciously and picked it up. He stroked it.

"You look as if you've never seen a rifle before, fella."

Pegasus shook his head.

"Eh? That right? It came from back on Arth." His stare seemed to lose itself in the resurgence of once-forgotten memories. "A good place . . . while it lasted."

Pegasus sighed. He had stumbled onto one of the Ones. The last time it had happened to him he had barely escaped with his life. Bloodthristy killer. If this One was the same—

He backed up a foot or two. "Hey, now. Don't run away on me. I won't hurt you. You don't have anything to fear from Poseidon, no sir."

Poseidon! Now he knew. Why . . . he

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had found the fabled realm of Orion and his father! He glanced about, taking his surroundings, and filled his lungs deeply with the humid air.

Poseidon looked again at the storm clouds. "I guess you were trying to tell me to prepare for the storm. I have to thank you for that."

Pegasus started to turn to fly away, now that he had given the warning.

"Hey, fella. Hold up a minute." He walked over and stood beside Pegasus' unfurled wings. "How would you like to do me another favour?"

A stare which told the man yes.

"Good. You probably know of my son; Orion." He pointed to a wide expanse of forest some miles up the side of one of the hills. "He's up there now, searching for Taurus."

Pagasus looked puzzled.

"Taurus . . . the Bull," Poseidon told him. "A mutant. He's been killing our chickens and livestock. Orion's out there with one of my rifles trying to hunt down that horror. What I want you to do is fly me over there so I can warn him about the storm." He shaded his eyes and peered up at the low-skidding blackness. "It looks like it could turn into a real pile-driver."

Pegasus nodded, flattened his wings so that Poseidon could climb onto his broad back. The man clenched his mane in his strong fingers and tightened his legs on his sides. A jump with powerful muscles and the two of them in the air, riding high into the sky.

A dirty haze off in the west showed the rain of the approaching storm. They might make it. But he'd have to push it—

The conifers were short and stubby. Pegasus skidded low over them, as slow as he could and still stay aloft. Poseidon scanned the flashing ground with his sharp eyes and saw his son crouching behind a large fern, undoubtedly awaiting Taurus. Pegasus saw him too, neighed shortly to attract his attention.

ORION LOOKED UP, amazed. Then, seeing his father riding on the back of the graceful animal, carefully waved his arm. Too much motion might scare away the Bull if he happened to be around there. Orion was hoping he was.

Nothing. No sound, no sight.

He can't be around here, Orion thought dejectedly. He gazed up again, saw Pegasus and his father wheeling in toward him and motioned them down. They alighted quietly on the turf beside him and Poseidon dismounted.

"Caw! Caw!" Corvus the Crow cried shrilly from his perch amongst the towering limbs of a nearby tree.

"Damn that bird!" Orion grumbled, clenching his fist tightly. "If he scares Taurus away . . ."

"No luck yet, son?" Poseidon asked, searching the woods grimly. Orion shook his head, his long jet hair fluttering in the wind.

"I thought I heard him once, but when I reached the spot there was no sign of him. Since then I've been lying low, waiting for him to come tramping past me; but no go. He's a crafty bugger."

"Aye, that he is," his father agreed, his lips silently cursing the Bull to hell. "Maybe tomorrow—"

"Tomorrow may be too late! We lost nine more hens today; there's no telling how many we'll lose if we let him escape. We've got to get him! Now!"

"I wish we could, son. I only wish we could." He knew how much they had

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lost already. They couldn't afford to lose any more. But— "There's a storm approaching. We've got to get back before it hits."

Orion stared up into the sky, his brows furrowing in anger. He grabbed up his rifle from the ground and started past his father. "The storm can to to—"

Poseidon laid a firm hand on his shoulder. "Now!"

Two pairs of eyes bore into each other. Both were unrelenting, unwilling to give in.

"C'mon. Get up on the horse. We're going back."

Orion shrugged off his father's hand but stood still. Then. "I'm not going back until I find that Bull and kill it! Go home if you want to, but I'm staying here!"

"Rrrrrrooaaarrrrrr!!" A crash of trees breaking and falling. Hard earth pounded by heavy hooves.

"That's him!" Orion cried, hefted his weapon and bounded off into the thickness of the woods.

"WAIT! Orion, stop!"

No use. He was already out of sight.

Nothing to do but go after him. "Stay here," he motioned to Pegasus with a wave of his hand. Then he was off also.

A second roar split the eerie silence of the forest. *Crash! Crash!*

Off to the left. Now straight ahead. As Poseidon burst into the clearing he saw Orion kneeling down, the powerful rifle nestled securely in the crook of his arm, pointed unwaveringly at Taurus. The Bull was charging.

His single loud shot rang out, echoing off the hills. A sheet of rain fell as Taurus screamed in agony, a bullet lodged in his chest. He raged, tormented, the steel tearing at his inner flesh. He clawed desperately at the wound, flicking spurts of blood into the air. Redness covered the earth and the Bull roared again, the pain increasing. He stood on his hind legs, swung a hefty fist at his attacker.

Orion took aim again and fired two more bullets into the tortured animal. Poseidon watched tensely.

A scream louder than before. Orion didn't shift his position.

Why didn't he pull the trigger? What was the boy waiting for?

Poseidon stepped out into the open, making erratic motions with his arms, trying to draw attention away from his son so that Orion could get a better aim.

THE HAMMER clicked on a empty chamber. No time to reload; the Bull had turned on his father now! Orion grasped the barrel of the gun in both hands and, running over to Taurus' blood-smeared side, brought the butt of the rifle down on his ugly head with a resounding thud.

It could only stun him. The Bull shook out the momentary pain, turned. Orion stepped back, held the weapon above his head. With a deep-throated roar suffused with a searing pain, Taurus plowed a thick forearm into Orion's gut.

"Orion!"

The sudden sound alerted the Bull. He bellowed deeply, and was on Poseidon in a moment. Taurus jammed his rock hard fist into the man's masked features. A dull smash and the sound of cracking bone. Then the flat of the Bull's hand across the side of Poseidon's face, slicing the skin,

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flowing blood.

Orion recovered dazedly, jumped up to his father's rescue. He held the gun like a battering ram and plowed the wooden end into Taurus' hide. The butt cracked, broke. Taurus leered, pain forgotten, and brought his knee up solidly into Orion's chest. The kick flung him backwards and the Bull turned to mangle Poseidon. A huge hoof came down on the older man's nose, breaking through the bone and cartilage and squeezing into his brain. The bull pulled it out and slammed the other into his rib-cage, ripping skin and breaking bone.

Orion's eyes opened in shock. His face blanched death-white with fear, then deepened to a scarlet red with rage. Taurus was a mortal enemy now!

His father—

The Bull grasped the limp body in his hugh mutant hands, picked it up over his head, threw it furiously at the ground, smashing it in a final blow.

—was dead.

The Hunter's clothers were clinging to him with the soaking rain. It fell from the darkened sky in pounding sheets. A flash of jagged lightning and an answering roll of deafening thunder just overhead. Getting hazy: hard to see the prey, now—

A shape, getting larger . . . fast! The Bull! *The Bull! THE BULL!* He had no weapon; the rifle was useless.

His aching shoulder touched the wet bark of a tree. Cover! He got his feet in motion and ducked behind the large bole. The Bull was almost upon the Hunter before he saw what he had done. By then it was too late to dodge: his head butted the trunk solidly, shaking loose a barrage of branches from overhead.

Taurus roared with agony.

(Orion glanced up, his eyes straining to pierce the curtain of rain. He knuckled them, trying to gnaw out the vision which he thought he saw above in the deluge of rain. A chariot, emblazoned with striking designs and motifs, drawn at a quick gallop by six bronze stallions, their handsome wings outspread in a splendor of beauty and speed. Their sleek manes whipped about in the gale. And the Charioteer—what was his name?—Auriga!—was driving the team of animals through the fierce storm, his firm hands holding the leather reins in a sure grasp, urging the horses ever onward. Irion wondered . . .

Taurus roared in agony again. Louder. And hit the tree with a clenched fist, making the bole sway with the sheer force of his blow.

Orion, on the opposite side of the tree from the enraged Bull, dared to step back from the cover. If he could make it over to the cliff—

The path down . . .

Taurus would have no chance on that, what with his awkward hooves and huge bulk. But he could make it!

The Bull still roaring and shaking his head, Orion dug his soggy fur boots into the wet ground and dashed for the edge of the cliff. His running feet beat rhythmically against the earth, pushing, pushing . . .

Too loud! Too loud by far in the sudden silence as the Bull stopped its roars—

—and charged the escaping figure. The distance between them shortened . . . shortened. Suddenly, Orion stopped dead in his tracks, turned to face the oncoming mortal machine bearing down on him with the power of a loco-

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motive. He tensed, ready.

When the Bull was almost upon him (he could feel the hot, fetid breath of the snorting creature and see clearly the blood-red eyes and the dripping teeth and the flaring nostrils and the grimy horns) he shifted all his weight to the right and sprang over the edge of the cliff. He landed on all fours, steady. A few grains of loose sand fell clattering to the rocks below. When he looked up he saw Taurus sailing over the edge, unable to stop his massive hulk. The Bull landed unbalanced on the sloping ledge but couldn't keep his footing. His hooves slipped, his shoulder banged the dirt, and he toppled over and down. Orion heard the thump reverberate in the canyon and peered over at the carcass.

Bloody and bruised. Cut and gored.

Dead. Orion nodded in satisfaction, pulled himself erect and made his way back up to the top of the cliff.

The mangled and beaten body of his father lay in a curled heap in a spreading pool of blood, diluted by the pouring rain. Orion looked, unable to pull his eyes away from the gruesome sight.

The remains of the broken rifle lay beside the body. Orion stooped to pick it up and held it in his hands. His thoughts wandered back to the days when he and his father had both been living.

Back to those days when they had been living on Arth. Before the Days of Demolition, the Days of Organization, the Days of Retreat and Days of Voyage. His father had taught him how to shoot the rifle by getting him up at five o'clock every morning for a month. They had climbed into their battered Ford and had sped off to the forest. His father had shown him the workings of the gun while they had lain in wait for the soaring ducks to pass by.

The cold and the wetness! Yes, he still remembered.

"I'll shoot the first duck—" Poseidon took the rifle from Orion's shaky hands and checked the chamber with a thorough eye "—and show you how it's done."

The unwary bird came gliding past their clump of marsh grass and his father pointed the rifle and shot. The thickness of his coat cushioned the recoil and the duck fell, plummetted, a ragged hole in its chest. It *plopped* on the ground some feet away and Canis Major (they called him 1; the other, younger, 2) loped up and retrieved the bird. He brought it back clenched in his teeth and dropped it in Poseidon's outstretched hand. Orion saw the deadness of the duck, stared. The duck stared back at him with wide dead eyes and he wanted to shove it as far away from him as possible.

"We'll have this for dinner tonight," his father told him mildly.

Orion nodded, open-eyes.

"Now you try it," his father said, thrusting the rifle into his son's arms. "Hold it up. That's it. Now, get it steady in the crook of your arm. Good." He pointed into the morning sky reddish at the horizon. "There's one now. Take aim and lead him just a little—you can't miss him."

Orion shut his eyes and pulled the trigger. The blast rang out and he jumped instinctively. Then he looked and watched the shot figure of the duck fall to the ground. Canis-2 scampered over and brought it back to Orion, dropping it onto his hands.

Its flesh on his. Feathers with drying

(continued on page 71)

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David Bunch returns with a story set in Moderan, where the inhabitants are more metal than flesh, and war flourishes endlessly. But this war was to be different. *This was to be—*

THE GOOD WAR

DAVID R. BUNCH

Illustrated by DAVE COCKRUM

IT WAS A GOOD thought for a Good War. I have to say: Once those wrinkly little bums in the L-Towers all over the world, our state ministers (stale ministers! *Ho*), did well their thing. Their thing was to govern with imagination at all times, and elan. *Ho!* Usually their performance was about as imaginative and as full of elan as garbage cans and fertilizer piles were in the Old Days.

But now they said we'd wage a Good War. It was right after our recent Dirty War had smeared the world and they, the state ministers, had derived so much fun and enjoyment from watching and judging that one that they decided to involve us all in a Good War, for even greater fun and enjoyment. For them. So they drew up the rules and laid down the plans. Then they made these official and binding upon us all by publishing Long Sheets in the vapor shield, Official Papers, the colored letters dancing and glowing on high-up black pieces of sky to tell us all how things were. We recorded the rules on each our own little sky dome note spaces in our new-steel Stronghold complexes, for ready reference, and got ready to wage.

I was competitive, as usual, as we all were, for is not that the essence of man? *Yes!* And especially is it the essence of new-man now, each in his cold-steel complex, the bulk of him new-metal man now, with the flesh-strips few and played-down. —I sent for my War Planning Board, hauled them up from each his own locked storage niche in my Stronghold basement dust (for it had been long since I had needed any advice on how to wage my wars) and we got ready for conference. I activated them all (they were steel men, of course, just weapons men, really with special Occupational Specialties built in) put their *think* track all on *plan*, and we were soon hard at it. Around the day we sat there; grimly we mulled. And at the end of it all we had a start. Or at least I hoped so. I wanted to win this war, as I want to win all wars. Losing is not my style, I'll tell you here and now and repeat it again. *Anytime!* My iron guts knot and knock at the

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mention of it, the stars turn blue in my flags; my eagles fall; I get sick! I cry when I think *lose! I can't stand it!*

The essence of the plan was really no plan yet. All the tracks of all those high-priced thinkers that I kept, most years not earning their keep, catch-locked on *sleep* long and long in my basement dust, said, "Send to Olderrun. Contact Olderrun. Get good ideas on good from Olderrun." *Well!* So, to learn about good, we'd go back to that little landlocked and sea-starved country where the flesh-people still strove. We'd go back to valentines and Sunday school. We'd contact church-thought ministers. We'd ask little old ladies at their sewing baskets and chortling kids at toys how best to go after good and harness it for our gain. We'd ask a man in prison on death row No. 1 how good he'd be with *one more* chance, *one more*. We'd query underpaid *(ha)* overworked *(ho)* educators on what they did about those four-letter words, smoking in the basement, telling fibs at recess and other such bad shows and ask if they practised what they preached, were sincere, in essence and so. *Ho!* We'd ask and we'd ask.

If nothing came of this, I'd melt those planners down, the whole Board full of them. I vowed it. When I seek the dope on good, I don't want bum steers. *No!* I want right courses. *Ha!* That's us.

A tight little packet came in from Olderrun that week, transmail, special delivery, registered and insured. And hungrily we read. For clues. "Be generous," it said. "When the good things come, let go the whole heart." "Don't stint." "Don't let anyone tell you it's not good to be good." "Nobody wins by saving up good for a

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stormy day. Let it all go out." "Good is the *most* you've got." "Give lots away, get lots back." "Good is the winner, finally, and the last lone counting arbiter of losses and bad times, the fair avenger." "*Smile!* If you can't smile, *grin;* that's a *good* start!" "If it hurts, put flowers on it all day." "Big bouquets are best!" "When valentines won't win, don't shoot your heart out." "Be good and smile brave when the total dark comes down and its a cold wind closing around your battered storm doors, because you can brave it, you good Galahad, you." "If you'll just spend it right, good will buy the world—*everytime!*" . . . . . And this went on for one hundred and twenty-five tightpacked pages! Imagine!

Well!! You can see we didn't have anything here but a lot of old Sunday school chin-ups and Epworth League reminders. I recalled the Board and let them have it straight. The kindest thing I said was, "Look: this is a war we're getting ready for, not a slogan tryout and qualification round for good-Johnnies. Get cracking! The melting pots stand hungry and, as of this instant, you're on top of the menu. Come up with a Plan. Or melt!"

Their buttons started to jump. From *plan* and *think* they went to *think* and *plan* and back again and back again. Then round and round over and across up and down the dazzling buttons flicked *on* and *off, on* and *off,* on my great Planning Board members. The lights danced, the blue fire flashed, there was life in those circuits and my men were using their programs to the top degree. Then, with the gist of a rough plan for a war of good, they went on *refine, refine, refine.* —They were not dumb; when they were turned on right, they were as smart as any War Planning Board automatics in the whole world. Now, in addition to being naturally smart, they were fighting for their very existences. They didn't want to liquefy in the hot pots, and who could blame them for that?

In fairness to these, my Board members, and I do *try* to be fair, all ways and always, I will say that the Grand Plan they came up with, out of the dancing buttons and the flashing blue fire in the circuits, was based on the homely things implicit in those one hundred and twenty-five tight-packed pages from Olderrun. For be it for better or for worse, and I say *weeeaaaooohhhaauuggh!* there is nowhere in the whole Universe that I know of *anywhere* that is a better place to go for bright sayings on *good* than to those flesh bums in Olderrun. *Fakes! Hypocrites!* Under-achievers in good that they are. And I ought to *know:* I'm from there a long long time past, God help us all!

But we had Our Plan now for the war current, and that was the main thing. And all the other Strongholds, except one, had each His Plan. Not a good one in the whole lot, I hoped, except mine. but I was glad they all had Plans, if they intended to wage. *Yes,* I'm competitive. Isn't man? Isn't that the essence of man—competitiveness, combativeness, win-at-all-costs-ness, "sorry old boy, I'm greatest, you know"-ness? Well, isn't it?

So we all had each Our Plan, except for this one little rag-tag fort 'way off over in a corner of a poor district, so I heard tell. He hadn't, it seemed, won any war, ever, and rumor was out now that his Stronghold was so dilapidated and completely fouled that it might never be anything but a wreck. His gun

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tubes all were hanging, his walls all were honeycombed, and his warning devices were not up to par either. And now the word was that he'd begged off on this Good War, said he didn't feel like a *go,* and just wanted to be a non-participator in any ambitious undertaking that might have the choice *win, lose. Well,* if that were true (and my face flesh-strips burning and stinging, embarrassed now for the whole family of man, I certainly hoped it was not) I personally thought he should have been voted out of the fraternity of man long ago; not just *Moderan,* but the whole League. I was all for using the big *Zero Corrector* on him, that machine in the North that can grind whole armies down to a powder finer than dust in almost no seconds flat. *Yes!* my disrespect for him almost knew no bounds at all, if you care to know it. Quitter! Non-fighter! War-evader! Danger-dodger! Yellow-stomach! No-person now!

But be that all as it may and let him rot, the non-achiever!—*We had a war on!* After two weeks of preparation, everybody planning and getting busily ready, each according to his own dear Blueprint, the opening shots were due. And well it was for that. Such a war! You wouldn't believe. Peace baskets, all ribbony, lobbing up in the middle of what was supposed to be a fight. *Ho Ho* flags on the vapor shield all over and in every color and crest. Everybody laughing with the *big* resounders on *loud.* Stronghold masters sending their full photos up in the sky and smiling those photos all over the place all the time, through beam control. Big hollow bombs up and floating, with flowers on them, painted all over, flowers! balloon bombs, really, and little mechanical birds in baskets hanging under them, the birds machined to sing of the Good War's good. What a war! And over everything the constant showers of flowers. Well, how was one to win such a war? It was all so *soft!* you know. How was anyone to gain the advantage? How outsoft them? I'd thought we had it all in the bag with our Grand Plan for good. But everyone was being so nice, fighting all the time, in the Good War, but being so nice. Laughing. Smiling. Good-cheering. Slapping of backs in every way. Confusing, huh? What a man has to take in this world! Sometimes. What a man has to do and swallow to stay a winner. And that was my determination, you know it! to stay a winner—at all costs. You'd better believe it was.

And then I had this Little Plan. To go with and top out and accentuate my Good War Grand Plan as drawn up by my gold-plated War Planning Board. —It stopped the show, what I did, I'll tell you plain. It really stopped the show. —I went to my World Hook-Up Announcement Room, where I, triggering things, can shoot my picture up into the air all over the world and make my image stick in the vapor shield just anywhere I want to, aye, in every foot of the sky. And I blared out to all of them, I really let them have it, my great inspiration, with my best smile vibrant before them on every foot of their Views. —(Sometimes, rare rare instance! the man, the thought and the instant all intersect at one grand gilded point in man and thought and instant to bring a Happening. Then surely, in spite of everything, something great and good journeys out from man to all the limits, even unto the limitlessness of all of *all.*) This was, I believed (and still

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believe), potentially such an occasion and as such should make great and worthwhile our war, and, just incidentally, make me the winner of that war.

So imagine how it was, my picture all over the skies of all the Moderan world, my voice coming from those smiling smiling pictures, through my World Hook-Up Annoucement Room, and I saying this magnificent offer to all peoples everywhere: "Hear, *everybody!* and hear *right!—I'll agree, and really believe it, that each and every man in all the universe is as good and deserving a man as I am, and I'll hold to it for ten full minutes, timed off on the Etern-Tells of the World.*—Or any ten-minute timing you want." Well, there it was! That should get that old human ego on the run—cause of the majority of human interrelationary problems—really sandblast it and sent it home on its shield. And, just incidentally, win for me the Good War. —It did seem an ultimate thing, this statement, this strategem, and as I let them have it, I knew it must surely end the show. It did. Everyone was stunned by the enormity of it when they turned each their thought buttons to it and went on *max-think.* And there I stood for the full ten minutes, ten big ones in the full urgency of time, ticked off on my Etern-Tell and Etern-Tells all over the world, my picture up and out for them all and I really believing, as I had said I would, and according to Stronghold honor (which everyone knows is sacred and holds dear) honor-bonded to that belief that every man in all the world for that ten minutes was as good and deserving a man in every way as I was.

Now, that's a humbling thing, I'll tell you here and now, and I wouldn't go through it again I just wouldn't. I felt, for those ten minutes, about as important and manly as a mangy bug crossing a decorated elephants' parade. In the Old Days. A very small, lean, short, unimpressive, sickly bug, at that. But when it was over, I *knew* I had won the war, and that was enough for me. Any way to win? *yes!* any way to win. —The war was over. The ribboned baskets came down; the balloon bombs all went home. What more was there to do?

How could anyone top it, what I had done, in under-competitiveness, open-hands friendliness and complete world camaraderie, unless he said, "than I, every man is better"? And that would just ring of such a contrived piety and such a hollow falsity as to bring the laugh machines out *everywhere.* No, for a human statement, I had stepped to the very outer limits of credibility and had paused there for ten full earth-stopping minutes. While the world gasped. Past that? Nowhere to go. All the competing Stronghold masters seemed to know that, and they quit. *Yes!* It was all over now but the counting of points and ultimately the awarding of the plaques. *To me!*

But *hey now!* and *here now!* You know what? All anger aside, all disappointment aside, all justice on its side with spears in it, bleeding and done, defiled, killed, found out, left homeless and forlorn—all justice down and wet and cold and blue, you know what? I didn't win! *I didn't win!!* You know what? All justice aside, all done *done* . . . You know what? *I didn't win the war' I lost !!* the war!!

I appealed the decision. I railed at the injustice. I lined my War Planning Board members up and kicked them all

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night. I cried to the walls at noon. I threatened to organize the Strongholds and tear the L-Towers down all over the world some louring day. I was so angered I spat steel. Flecks from my iron windpipe came up and formed a froth necklace on my outraged new-metal lips, so great was my ire.

All that hard effort for good in the Good War and that supreme humbling for ten minutes at the end, and still no winner's circle. *No!* They gave it— Oh, how can I bear it to tell it? The pain burns long and deep, to tell of another's win . . . They gave it to that little, that meager, that nothing, that no-achiever, that quitter, that withdrawer, that dormant non-doer, that resigner, that low unspeakable one, that one who wouldn't . . . Since he wouldn't . . . they said . . . he was . . .

Oh! Oh!—My brain still reels . . . to remember . . . I set my fort on the status of *continuous blast*, programed it to destroy the world fifty-five straight times without stopping, took to my bed and slept through fifteen world gun-downs with automatic shoot-outs of max-destruction to annihilation. Before I could get even a little bit resigned to my loss of the war.

—DAVID R. BUNCH

DARK OF THE STORM

(continued from page 65)

blood. Blood on his fingers. He wiped them on his pants and flung the dead bird into the wicker basket.

His father smiled proudly and clapped his son heartily on the back.

"That's enought for today, son. Let's get back to the house, huh?"

All the way back those two dead ducks were in the same car with Orion and later—

—they were in his stomach.

His father's torn body reminded him of those birds. He steeled himself and forced down the foulness that had risen in his throat.

With the butt of his rifle he bent down and started digging a grave. His grey eyes stared fixedly at the ground and he turned away from his father's last resting place. From the corner of his eye he noticed Pegasus step into the clearing from a clump of trees. The horse looked at him questioningly, but he declined the offer to ride home. Tonight he would walk.

He watched as Pegasus leapt into the air, the wind seeming to pull him with helping hands. The wings flapped, carrying him aloft into the diminishing rain.

Orion watched until the Horse was but a dark speck in the distant sky, then turned and made his way out of the forest onto the main path. The normal sounds of the woods were gone, a sense of death and doom pervading the atmosphere. The songs of the birds were still. The rumbles of the bears had disappeared. The clawing of the raccoons were no more.

The storm—

He remembered. And what he remembered he wanted to forget. But he'd carry on his duties. He'd carry on . . . in the wake of Poseidon.

—VINCENT PERKINS

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WHO'S AFRAID

Calvin Demmon is the author of four short-shorts published almost ten years ago in Fantasy & Science Fiction *and the remarkable "Servo" (*Amazing Science Fiction, *March, 1971). Often-referred to as "California's B. Traven," little else is known about him, except that he did* not *refuse to collaborate with Philip K. Dick on a novel,* The Cosmic Eggs of Pfnark, *which, we are assured, may yet be written.*

CALVIN DEMMON

Illustrated by DAVE COCKRUM

April 2, Sunday

LAST NIGHT, quite by accident, I made a wonderful discovery. This ceases to be the journal of a mere boy: I am a werewolf.

I shall try, as always, to relate events as objectively as possible, although the emotional content of my experience was very high. My father, who is an insomniac, takes sleeping pills. I have been curious about them for some time. I read voraciously, voluptuously, and at the age of thirteen I am considerably more intelligent and better informed thay any of my peers. I have read that sleeping pills can produce delightful changes of consciousness: if one struggles to stay awake while under their influence, he will find himself in a dream-like, relaxed, joyous state. My curiosity finally impelled me to enter my parents' room yesterday morning after Father had left for work, and to remove one pill from the bottle by his bedside. I hid the pill and swallowed it after Mother had put me to bed last night, and waited in excitement for the effects. At first I felt a dry lump in my throat, from swallowing the pill without water, and I was afraid it was caught and would not get to my stomach. But I suppose that my throat had merely been abraded by the passage of the dry pill, for I began to be very drowsy in about fifteen minutes. Like a fool, I remained in my bed instead of getting up and walking around to stay awake. I soon fell asleep, and as a result the notebook in which I had planned to enter my observations is empty.

I awoke from a nightmare and found myself on the floor. I tried to get up and found that my arms seemed short and were difficult to maneuver. I looked down at them and discovered that they had receeded into my pajama sleeves and were hidden from my view. With some difficulty I shrugged the sleeves back and saw that my arms were covered with coarse hair and that my hand were gone. In their place were large paws which flexed as I tried to reach out with my finger. I was terrified of course, and tried for a moment to

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convince myself that I was dreaming. But that peculiar quality of consciousness which lets one *know* he is awake would not leave me. Nor could I believe that the pill was causing me to hallucinate. No, I was awake, but the room was filled with odors which I could not immediately identify, and my ears were assailed with unfamiliar sounds. I cried out; my cry was the howl of an animal, and it so surprised me that I made no more sounds.

When I began to understand that I had undergone a remarkable transformation, my fear gave way to a sense of freedom and joy. I squirmed out of my oddly-fitting pajamas (freeing my tail, which I was able to move with practically no initial difficulty) and spent the hours in my room indentifying new sensations and correlating them with old sensations. A peculiarly exhilarating smell, for example, puzzled me for some time, until I finally realized that it came from the slaughterhouse, some miles from my home.

I stayed in my room until morning, circling the floor and becoming accustomed to my new body. At daybreak, I fell unconscious. When I awoke, much to my disappointment, I was once more human. My feeling of loss was great, and I began to wonder again if I had been dreaming. But there were coarse hairs on the rug, and the doorknob bore tooth marks where I had tried to turn it before deciding that I should stay in my room.

I wondered how many other werewolves there were in San Francisco.

April 3, Monday

NOTHING HAPPENED last night, although the moon was full. It could be that the moon has nothing to do with it.

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I stayed awake in eager anticipation—perhaps the transformation requires relaxation and unconsciousness which I am unable to achieve without the aid of a sleeping pill. I am not sure how much the pill has to do with it, however, and my hope is that the change is unrelated to drugs. Perhaps one does not begin to change until he has arrived at a certain age, when the unusual capacity reveals itself—and I am at an age when many changes are occurring in my body, much to the apparent embarrassment of my parents, and to my delight at their discomfort. At any rate, tonight I will again take one of Father's pills. I have it ready; I stole it from his bedroom this afternoon, barely escaping discovery by my mother, whom I told I was "looking for a comic book." She knows perfectly well that I do not read comic books, as they are of absolutely no intellectual merit, but she has avoided provoking me lately on any subject, and she accepted my explanation. I think she is preparing herself to tell me about the so-called "facts of life"—how amazed she would be to find that my knowledge of the subject is extensive, due to careful reading of readily available books in the public library.

If I change this evening, I must go out. I want to test myself—to see how fast I can run and how far. Hopefully the sleeping pill will not slow me down too much. I suspect that the transformation will again do away with the pill's effects.

April 4, Tuesday

WHAT an adventure! The mind of a scientist in the body of a wolf!

I awoke at midnight, and knew that I had again become a wolf. I was still in my bed, and experienced some difficulty in struggling from beneath the covers. There was no problem with my pajamas this time, though, as I had gone to bed naked. I moved quietly to the door, which I had left ajar, and padded softly into the hall. I could practically see in the dark, and the house was filled, it seemed, with my glorious scent—the smell of a wolf, eager to be out and running in the city. The door to my parents' room had been left partially open, but I could hear them breathing regularly inside, so I slipped past, down the stairs, and into the kitchen, where I was able with no difficulty to spring the latch on the back door and let myself out into the alley.

How beautiful the city is at night! My Wolf eyes were able to see far better than I had hoped. The moonlight, and the diffused illumination from the street lamps and traffic lights, brightened the city so that I thought for a moment I had overslept and that it was daytime. But no, there was no sun, and the city was asleep.

Down the street I ran, delirious in my freedom, faster and faster, the wind in my fur and my heart pounding with joy. I abandoned my attitude of scientific detachment for the moment, almost without noticing, and allowed myself to experience these new sensations without attempting to catalogue them.

My reflection appeared and disappeared as I ran past store windows, and I saw myself for the first time: I was big, bigger than the biggest dog I had ever seen and I was grey and lean. I knew now though, that I looked enough like a dog not to attract attention—for who expects to see a wolf in the city at night, and who in the city has ever seen a wolf at all outside Fleischaker Zoo?

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My energy was boundless. I ran on; I was at least two miles from home and was only beginning to warm up. I leaped, I breathed easily, I felt that I could run forever.

Ahead lay Golden Gate Park. A lone police car swung out of the park and down the street, paying me no attention—for the police concern themselves only with the crimes of men, and leave the business of watching dogs (and wolves!) to the dogcatcher. I had passed few dogs—I believe the dogs of the city must have smelled the running wolf and hidden themselves. I ran into the park.

I raced and ran beneath the stars, bounding across the meadows, stopping now and then to roll over and over in the wet grass, and then shaking myself dry. The park took on completely new dimensions for me. I was no longer limited to the bicycle paths, nor did I become bored as I had when walking through the park with my parents, who always kept a close watch on me.

Thirsty, I stopped and lapped cool water from the fountain in front of Steinhart Aquarium. I discovered my hunger and made a quick experimental meal of a foolish squirrel which had climbed head first down a tree to watch me. I could sense its surprise. The city dogs had never been as fast as it. I caught it with no effort, letting my wolf reflexes and judgment guide me, and I ate it all, finding the tast entirely agreeable. Father has a habit of eating raw hamburger meat occasionally, a practice which always revolted me until last night, when I began to understand him.

Suddenly I realized that I had lost all track of time, and I left the park and ran back towards home. Still hungry, I easily caught and devoured a calico cat which was stupidly alseep under a parked truck, and then ran on, gaining the rear porch and pushing the door shut with my nose as I entered the kitchen. Up the stairs, past my parents (who slept on), and into my room. I flopped panting beside my bed and fell almost immediately asleep. When I awoke it was morning, and I was a naked boy on the floor. I skipped breakfast before school, telling Mother that I was not hungry!

I stole another pill from Father this afternoon. Tonight, to the beach!

April 5, Wednesday

MOST PECULIAR. There are at least two other werewolves in the city. I was pursued almost immediately as I left the house last night. I smelled them and heard them running behind me. I was unable to elude them, though they could not catch me, and I ran for miles, circling back towards my home. I entered the kitchen and pushed the door shut, but I could hear them still, sniffing and growling outside.

I will have to befriend them or kill them. They must not interfere with my explorations. However, I cannot take them both on at once, though they are older than I am, and, from the sound of their breathing, tire more quickly. So I have formulated a plan with which to deal with them in case they prove too unfriendly. I suspect that they have been werewolves much longer than I, for they seem confident and sure of themselves, and they were not at all surprised to see me—but I have the advantage of my strength, intelligence, and youth.

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April 6, Thursday

IN my excitement I had forgotten that the world regards me still as a boy. I am free at night, but I am watched and made to obey, both at home and at school, during the day. When I sneaked into my father's bedroom yesterday afternoon to steal a pill for the night I discovered that the bottle was gone. I looked in all the drawers of his bureau, in his closet, and in my mother's things, but the pills were not there. I think the old man suspects—although it is possible that he merely took the prescription to have it refilled. At night, in my bed, I was able to fall asleep, although greatly agitated, but I awoke in the morning without having undergone the change. I think the pills are necessary for me at the present time—though I expect to be able to do without them with enough practice.

What a prospect! A lifetime—a long lifetime—spent as a normal human being by day, and as a wolf by night, able to venge myself, if I am so inclined, in my wolf form on all who trouble me by day. There are a couple of people I can think of, at school, whom I suppose I will eventually get to. But I must get those pills first.

April 7, Friday

MY FATHER knows I took the pills—or suspects, anyway; naturally I denied everything.

I entered his room again this afternoon, before he got home from work, but the pills were still missing. At dinner he behaved coldly toward me, and Mother was nervous, jumping up and down to fetch food and keep Father's coffee cup full. She was obviously trying to placate him.

I could see that he was thinking how to approach the subject. Finally, he said, "Your mother tells me that she found you in our room the other day, prowling around."

I could see from his opening that he was not completely sure of himself, or he would not have given me a chance to explain, so I tried to dismiss him lightly. "Oh, Father, *really*. I wasn't *prowling*. I was looking for a *comic* book."

He sipped his coffee. "What made you think one of your comic books would be in our bedroom?"

He was getting away from the subject, and I hoped to steer him even further away. "I looked *everywhere* for it. I borrowed it from Hank"—an obvious lie, I detest Hank and would snap his neck if I had the chance—" and he wanted it back. I thought perhaps Mother had found it and had hidden it from me." I glanced at her, and could see that she going to have no part in the discussion—perhaps, I hoped, she and Father had talked the matter over beforehand and she had urged him not to bring it up at all. "But it was completely *innocuous*." I tried to affect the patient manner one uses when talking to a very old person who does not understand, although I knew that Father was keen, and in control of himself.

And he was not so easily turned away. "There's something else," he said. "You know that I take sleeping pills." He waited for a response from me, but I kept my expression blank. "I keep a close count on them so I'll know when to get more, and so I won't accidentally take too many." He paused again. Mother was busily clearing the table, listening but taking no part. "The pills began disappearing, one a day for

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several days until I removed them from the bedstand. And your mother tells me that you've been sleeping late in the morning, and that you are difficult to awaken. I think you've been taking my pills."

My best tactic, I decided, was to behave as though shocked and indignant. "But *Father,*" I said, shaping my face to show hurt disbelief. "I wouldn't steal from *you.* What would I do with *sleeping* pills? I am sorry that you feel it necessary to distrust me."

He was unsure, I could see. Nevertheless, he persisted. "You are to stay away from our room. Those pills are for adults. If I find that you have been there again I shall punish you severely."

He apparently regarded the matter as settled, for he left the table and went to his den to read the evening paper. But it was far from settled. He did not realize that he had told me exactly what I wanted to know—the pills were still in the bedroom.

April 8, Saturday

I WAS reckless today, but I needed to be reckless. I stole another pill. I had no trouble finding the bottle; it was tucked beneath the mattress on my father's side of the bed. There were five pills in the bottle, and I replaced the one I removed with a vitamin capsule I had taken from the bathroom. It looked enough like the other pills to pass a cursory inspection; I hoped that since there were so few in the bottle Father would not take them out to count them. I cannot keep this up, however. The substitute pill might taste differently, and Father might grow suspicious if he takes it and it fails to put him to sleep. I have one pill, at least. How Father underestimates me!

I have an almost overwhelming desire to take it immediately, but I have decided that I must wait; this is Saturday night and the city will be busy. I am not ready yet to go out among large groups of people. I will take it tomorrow night, when everyone is resting up for work on Monday morning.

April 10, Monday

I TOOK the pill last night at bedtime, and the change was almost instantaneous. I did not even fall asleep. I felt my arms and legs grow shorter and stronger, and hair sprout on my neck and spread down over my back and my body. I fell to the floor on all fours and the world of sounds and smells which only a wolf can experience crashed down about me. I wasted no time in getting out of the house.

The other two werewolves were waiting for me in the alley. They started towards me, but I was able to run between them and out into the street. They ran behind me, growling and barking, but I was as fast as they were and was able to keep ahead of them. I was greatly annoyed. The problems I had had getting the one pill that I had just taken, a pill that might be the last I could get for a long while, had put me in a state of extreme tension, and now these two fools were again wasting my time, wasting my night. I would have to dispose of them, and I thought I knew how to do it. My plan was not subtle, and it involved considerable risk to myself, but I could see not other alternative. If I wanted to be free to do as I pleased I would have to get rid of the other two werewolves.

(continued on page 106)

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ALEXEI PANSHIN

A warning: the story which follows is not a fantasy at all—but the mental and emotional state which underlies the protagonist's actions must surely be unreal. . . on such—

A FINE NIGHT TO BE ALIVE

DICK STARKEY STOOD in the night shadows at the edge of the asphalt parking lot. While his eyes wandered over the cars, his left hand savored the solid weight of the .22 revolver. He idly bounced its reality against his thigh and hummed.

Starkey was dark-haired, a little more than medium height, stockily built, pleasant-faced and essentially ordinary. He was young, perhaps twenty.

All three stores in the little shopping center were open—drugstore, chain supermarket, and a discount house with colored plastic pennants over the entrance. The night breeze was light and fresh and the temperature was just cool enough for the tan poplin jacket he was wearing.

Random was the name of the game. He picked out a car, a light gray Buick Riviera. It was parked at the edge of the lot nearest the drugstore.

There was only a five minute wait. The owner was about forty, well-dressed, heavy-set and balding. Prosperous. He came across the lot with a white paper bag in his hand.

Dick opened the car door swiftly and slid in beside the man as he was buckling his safety belt.

"Jesus! What is this, kid? Hey, that's a prescription!"

Dick flipped the paper sack into the back and sat sideways, his back against the door. He brought the pistol up to point squarely at the man's middle.

"Look, if it's money you're after, I only have a few. . ."

"Start the car," Dick said in a friendly, reasonable voice. "Turn left on the boulevard and keep going. I'll tell you where to go from there."

Exasperatedly, the man asked, "What's the point?"

"Shut up," Dick said casually, and slammed the butt of the pistol sharply against the man's arm.

The man gasped and held the arm tightly, his eyes closed, his breathing audible. Sweat stood out on his forehead. His composure was gone.

"Now do as you're told. Don't argue with me. Don't try to attract attention. Just drive. I want to show you something."

The man touched the wetness on his forehead and looked at his fingertips,

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then knuckled his forehead. Then he turned on his lights and switched on the ignition. Dick relaxed as they swung onto the boulevard. The man was silent, looking straight ahead at the road, his hands tight on the wheel.

After a few minutes of driving, Dick said, "Where do you keep your wallet?"

"In my right front pocket."

"Reach for it with your left hand and slip it out on the seat."

The man steered with his right hand and awkwardly removed the wallet. Dick picked it up with his gloved right hand and flipped it open. He held it up to the light from the street and saw there were eleven dollars in it.

"You weren't kidding, were you? Keep your eyes on the road! Eleven dollars. Charge everything, hey?"

The man looked away and said, "Keep it."

Buy me for eleven dollars? You can't buy me off," Dick said. "I told you. I want to show you something." He flicked a look at the traffic behind them and then said, "I saw a tv program last week with a deal like this—a guy with a gun and a man driving. The driver got the gun away. That's tv, but I didn't believe it. He'd never have had the guts to try if it really counted. Would he?"

Almost inaudibly, the man said, "No."

"Right. Damn straight. If you tried to take the gun—*bang*, and you'd never know how it all comes out."

He began sorting through the plastic cards in the wallet.

"Your name is Palmer, eh?"

You pronounce the 'l'," the man said.

"Is that important to you?"

With a certain nervous courage, Palmer said, "Are you running from the police?"

Dick laughed. "Are you kidding? Why would I be running from the police? I haven't done anything."

"Are you on. . .on pot?"

"Christ, do you take me for a longhair? I wouldn't fog my mind."

He sat easily at an angle on the seat. The gun in his left hand was propped on his knee and pointed at Palmer. He held the wallet in his right hand and flipped the cards with his thumb. He split his attention between the cards and Palmer.

"Tell me, what do you do, Mr. Palmer?" he asked.

"I sell insurance," Palmer said. Then, agitatedly, "What are you doing to me? I've got a family! I'm late!"

"Life insurance?"

"Farm insurance. Farm insurance."

"Oh." Dick stopped at a picture. "Is this your family?"

"Yes."

"Good looking kids. Where does the boy go to school?"

"St. Johns."

"I almost applied there," Dick said, "but I wound up at Baltimore instead. That's the way things happen." He closed the wallet and dropped it on the seat. "Turn on Lake Forest."

The city had thinned. Along this stretch of the boulevard the road was a line between two neon margins of bars, gas stations and motels. There was a yellow caution light at the intersection. At Dick's gesture, they swung right.

"What's the medicine for, Mr. Palmer?"

"My wife has a case of eczema. She's waiting for the medicine. I was supposed to be home for dinner."

"Being late isn't the worst thing in the world," Dick said. "Your wife can

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wait for awhile. Have you ever seen a dead man, Mr. Palmer?"

"My God!"

"I was just asking you. All I was doing was asking you."

After a moment, Palmer said, "I've been to funerals."

"Closed or open coffin?"

"All right," said Palmer. "I haven't . No."

"They insulate you from death," Dick said. "I think they ought to make people stand in line to walk through the morgue. You never see a dead man and you never see a man dying. Do you believe it when somebody dies in the movies?"

"I guess not."

"No. You think, 'If they tried to kill me like that, it wouldn't be *that* easy. It wouldn't be all that simple.' It takes awhile to realize that death doesn't just happen to other people. You are going to die, too, and there isn't a single thing you can do about it."

"God, kid!" Palmer said. "Do you have to talk that way?"

Dick blinked at the vehemence. "What are you shouting for? You don't have to shout."

The road was two lanes, trees lining both sides. Just ahead at the top of a rise, there was a break in the trees and a gravel road on the left.

"Turn there," said Dick.

Palmer turned.

Dick said, "You know the trouble with life? Most people don't have any way to control it. I had a brother. Bright kid. All-City in high school. Football. All sorts of headlines. I never even got a letter. He's dead now—leukemia—and nobody but me knows that he ever lived. Nobody cares. It was just his turn and he died. And there's nothing to show that he ever lived. He was *scared* before he died. He told me. He was afraid of being nothing. He used to lie awake at night and cry."

"I'm sorry," said Palmer, "I'm sorry."

"That isn't the point," Dick said. "Stop the car up here." He indicated with the gun.

Palmer stopped the car.

"Switch off. Put out the lights."

Palmer did. The only light was from the night sky. The road was a silver line. Palmer sat looking straight ahead, his hands on the steering wheel, his lips moving soundlessly.

"Give me the keys."

Palmer took the keys from the ignition and passed them over.

"You can have your wallet back now."

Palmer picked up the wallet.

"Get out of the car," Dick said.

Palmer opened the door. Dick opened his door and started to get out. With Dick halfway in and halfway out, Palmer began to run heavily up the road, a floundering run.

Dick held his left wrist with his right hand and squeezed off a careful shot. It whined past Palmer's feet. "Stop right there."

Palmer halted, ludicrously off-balance. He was still holding the wallet in his right hand and the packet of credit cards and pictures was dangling in a long streamer.

"Come on back here," Dick said. "I told you. I want to show you something."

After a moment, Palmer swung around. He closed his eyes briefly and then he trudged back toward Dick.

"Up against the car," Dick said.

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When Palmer was leaning awkwardly with outstretched arms braced on the body of the Buick, Dick moved to the rear, opened the trunk, pulled out the tire iron, and slammed the trunk down again. With the iron in hand, he walked up close to Palmer.

"Has anything bad ever happened to you, Mr. Palmer?" he asked.

Palmer didn't answer.

Dick prodded him in the midsection with the iron. Palmer said, "No," in a muffled voice.

Dick slammed the iron at the window an inch from Palmer's left hand, a vicious backhanded swing. The glass shattered. He swung again and another window broke. Glass showered over the interior of the car.

Dick reached into the back seat and took out the medical prescription. He ripped the bag open and discarded it. He opened the brown pill bottle, scattered the pills on the gravel and then tossed the empty bottle into the brush.

"But. . ." said Palmer.

"Oh," said Dick, "it's not as bad as it might be. Rip off the car antenna. Break it off."

After a moment, Palmer walked forward, took a grip on the car antenna and struggled with it. It finally broke off and Palmer looked at it in his hands and then dropped it.

"You could make a zip gun with that," Dick said. Then he tossed the tire iron at Palmer's feet and it made a clink as it landed.

"Break the rest of the windows," Dick said. "Go on."

Palmer picked up the time iron. He swung ineffectually at the front window and the iron bounced off the rounded glass.

"Harder! Hit it for real."

Palmer swung again with his full plump weight and the glass cracked, a radiating pattern. He hit it again until it broke through. Then the rest of the windows, one by one, all around the car. When they were all broken, Palmer stood slumped. He was crying.

"It was a new car," he said. "It isn't paid for."

"Bang in the fenders."

"The police are going to get you. You just can't do things like this."

"Why would the police want me?" Dick said. "I'm just showing you something. Now bang in the fenders."

Palmer lifted the tire iron and brought it down. He was crying and shaking his head.

"Do your kids love you?" Dick asked. He was crying, too.

"Yes!" Palmer shouted, and hit the car again.

"I'll bet they don't."

"They do."

"Stop," said Dick. The tears were running down his face and his voice was shaking. "Face me. Face me. You're a good man, aren't you?"

"Yes."

"And your kids love you. And you run errands for your wife. And you work hard. And it doesn't make any difference. Do you understand? Do you see? When the finger points at you, you're dead. And it's my finger."

He raised the pistol and fired. "See? See? See?"

There were three light flat shots. The tire iron dropped from Palmer's hand, landed on its end and then toppled. Palmer put his hands against his chest, sagged against the car and made a desperate sobbing noise. Then he coughed and fell to the ground.

(continued on page 118)

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F. M. Busby ("The Puiss of Krrlik", April) returns with another remarkable vignette, this time about a man who took drugs and saw good and sufficient reason to withdraw from—

THE REAL WORLD

F. M. BUSBY

"I AM MOST impressed by your improvement, Crawford," the doctor said, "and very pleased." He smiled again. Hercules, the muscular attendant, smiled too. Maybe it was Ajax, the other attendant. They're not different enough to matter, including their real names.

My name is not Crawford. It used to be but it isn't any more. I don't know what my name is now. I haven't decided.

"Two weeks ago you were catatonic," Doctor Baumer continued. "Just two weeks, and now here you sit talking to me, feeding and dressing yourself every day, with only a few minor behavior problems to overcome." He beamed. Beaming was one of his specialties; he did it well. Sometimes he almost convinced me.

I have more than minor behavior problems to overcome. I've seen too much. I've seen the underside of the universe—the one they don't tell you about. And the world doesn't want to let me forget the sight.

I suppose it began when my new roommate moved in last quarter. Before, I'd probably been no more miserable than anyone else.

"Soon you'll be going home, Crawford."

I nodded.

"And this time you'll know enough to stay away from the drugs that put you here."

Of course, Doctor.

My new roommate's name was Frankel. He was a Ph. D. candidate in organic chemistry, and an acid-head. I dropped a little myself sometimes but not the way Frankel did. Frankel cooked up new variations in the lab and tried them out on himself and on his friends. Frankel gave me some beautiful trips, very educational. Nothing compared to the one I gave him, I suppose, but mostly well and good.

"I'm glad to see you participating in the exercise program," the doctor said. "Nothing like a sound mind in a sound body; right?"

"Nothing at all," I said. I wouldn't

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have it any other way." I lie a lot. Crawford never lied.

Acid and similar substances cut you free from the limited ways you've always looked at the world. They let you see it in new perspectives, some of which are possibly true. They may even let you see God, or His absence, or the footprints He left when last He passed this way. Acid itself never did quite that for me.

Doctor Baumer kept telling me how nice it was that I was so much better. I looked beyond him to pastel pictures of seagulls against the pale green wall. I wanted to look out the window behind me to see what the world was up to, but that would not have been polite, so I didn't.

"Would you like to learn to play handball, Crawford?" the doctor asked. "I work out solo every day; I'd be glad to teach you."

Yes. I nodded again. The handball court is small, indoors, in the basement. I'd been there but I didn't remember exactly, because I wasn't noticing.

"Handball is a lot of fun. Really gets the kinks out of your muscles."

I wonder if anyone will ever rediscover the drug Frankel brought home from the lab one Friday afternoon. It wasn't derived from lysergic acid; I never knew its pedigree. Frankel always talked in Chemical and I don't speak that language very well. Whatever it was, there was only enough for the two of us; we dropped it early one Saturday morning.

In the middle of the afternoon or perhaps six years later I saw where God had been and why He left. I couldn't really blame Him. Frankel saw it too; it showed in his face. I liked Frankel. Using my Karate training I was able to kill his body with one abrupt chop, to spare him any more of the seeing. Then I curled up on my bunk and killed Crawford's mind. That took longer, but at last I was no longer Crawford.

"We'll have to wait until tomorrow morning, though, Crawford."

"That's all right."

"And tomorrow afternoon I have a surprise for you."

I raised my eyebrows.

"Nothing to worry about. Just a little injection to correct the metabolic flaw that made you so vulnerable to breakdown under stress. When you leave here you'll never have to worry again about losing touch with the real world."

"But we can play handball in the morning?"

"Really interested, are you, Crawford? Certainly we can. My promise on it." Doctor Baumer was very meticulous about keeping promises to his patients, to gain and keep their trust. I appreciated that.

"Aren't you interested in the new injection treatment, though?"

I nodded.

He opened the combination-lock of his office refrigerator and showed me a vial of purple fluid. "I'm the only one here who uses it," he said, "but they've had fantastic results in England. Zero relapse rate. It's going to open up a whole new era in mental health."

"That's wonderful," I said. There is only one door to the handball court.

"Well, it's been a rewarding interview, Crawford." The doctor rose and extended his hand for me to shake. "I suppose you'd like to go out and take advantage of Grounds Privileges for awhile before dinner now, wouldn't you? The gardens are becoming rather lovely, aren't they?"

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"Yes, I would. Yes, they are." I supposed I'd better, since he thought I should want to. We were still shaking hands but finally we stopped.

I went out into the grounds escorted by Hercules. He left me alone outdoors; that was a first. The world was still there, as I had expected. Well, I shouldn't complain; it can't help it. Certainly it didn't ask me to trip with Frankel. Actually the world fakes it pretty well, for the most part.

There was a light warm breeze; over the scent of flowers I noticed that one of the attendants was smoking dope behind a thick green hedge. I envied him. Grass is better than nothing, even though it's not enough. Even though nothing is.

Eventually I went in to dinner. I enjoyed my status as the Improved Patient, with all the smiles and encouraging helloes. I enjoyed the flavors of those foods I allowed myself to taste; I am rather particular, of late, as to what I allow myself to experience. When I have the choice.

I enjoyed lying in my room with the door open. I thought I'd better, because it hadn't been that way for long and wouldn't be for much longer. Ajax or possibly Hercules gave me my sleepy pill and watched to see that I swallowed it. After he left I thought of what I would do in the handball court this morning. Then I escaped from the world, thankfully into sleep.

I was wrong, of course; I didn't do anything in the handball court except play a lot of very clumsy handball, because Ajax and Herculed were there, each standing in a corner pretending not to exist. Doctor Baumer pretended they weren't there, too. But of course they were; for their benefit I played handball, quite badly. Doctor Baumer said I was doing just great; I'm not the only one who lies a lot. The world is the best liar of all. It pretends to be bearable, until you catch it out. Then it won't pretend any more, at all.

At lunch I tasted a veal cutlet, because for the first time I was allowed to cut my meat for myself. I ate but did not taste the zucchini; I loathe zucchini.

After an hour or so of Grounds Privileges, Hercules or Ajax came to take me to Doctor Baumer's office. It is not small, but very crowded. That is why only Hercules or Ajax was there and not both.

I waited, smiling, until Doctor Baumer operated the combination lock and was opening the refrigerator door. Then I broke the neck of Ajax or Hercules to kill his body, and locked the office door.

"What are you doing, Crawford?" the doctor shouted. "And *why?*" I told him. Then I killed his body also.

There was the hypodermic needle and the vial of purple liquid. I injected myself with a few cc's of saline solution to mark my arm properly. Then I filled the needle from the vial, shot a dab of purple fluid onto the mark and washed the rest of it down the sink. Yes, it looked convincing. I smashed the purpled needle against the wall.

I unlocked the office door, for it was time to scream and shout, to beat my head and hands against the wall. I used no Karate when Hercules or Ajax came, even though he hurt me. I said I couldn't remember anything after the injection. Ajax or Hercules frog-marched me to my room, strapped me down and gave me a sedative. As sleep pushed the world away, I thought how nice it was that none of them would be

(continued on page 118)

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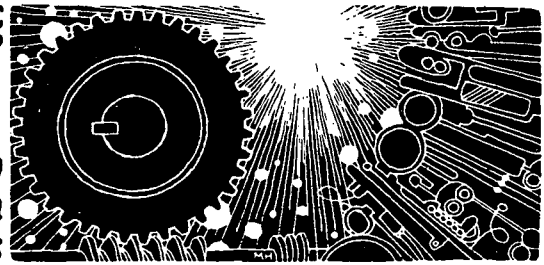
L. SPRAGUE de CAMP



Literary Swordsmen & Sorcerers

PRATT AND HIS PARALLEL WORLDS

MY LATE FRIEND and collaborator Fletcher Pratt (1897-1956) was a connoisseur of heroic fantasy before that term was invented. He read Norse sagas in the original and extravagantly admired E. R. Eddison's *The Worm Ouroboros*. Curiously, he despised Howard's Conan stories—next to Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings* three-decker, the most successful books in the genre—because their occasional crudities and lapses of logic exasperated him. He had no use for heroes who merely battered their way out of traps by means of bulging thews, without using their brains.

Pratt also tried his own hand at such stories. Besides his several collaborations with me, he wrote two major novels in the genre in the late 1940s, *The Well of the Unicorn* and *The Blue Star*.

(Murray) Fletcher Pratt, the son of an upstate New York farmer, was born on one of the Indian reservations near Buffalo. He claimed that this gave him the right to hunt and fish in New York State without a license, but he had never availed himself of the privilege.

As a youth, five feet three but wiry and muscular, Pratt undertook two careers in Buffalo. One was that of a librarian; the other, that of a prize-fighter in the flyweight (112-pound) class. When not stamping library cards, he was working out in the gym. He fought several fights, lost a couple of teeth, and knocked one opponent cold. When the story appeared in the Buffalo papers, the head librarian told him it simply would not do to have one of their employees knocking people arsy-varsy. Forced to choose between his careers, Pratt chose the library.

Soon afterwards, Pratt entered Hobart College at Geneva, New York, on Lake Seneca. When the coach learned that Pratt had been in the ring, he tapped him for an assistant in his boxing class. World got around that this funny-looking little freshman, who was showing the boys in the gym how to do rights over lefts, was the real thing. As a result, and somewhat to his disappointment, Pratt was never hazed.

At the end of Pratt's freshman year, his father fell on hard times. Pratt had to leave college. In the early 1920s he worked as a reporter for the Buffalo *Courier-Express* and on a Staten Island paper. Later, he settled in New York City with his second wife, the artist Inga Stephens Pratt. (His first wife had tried to force him to confine his writing to poetry.) For

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several years he held a succession of fringe literary jobs, such as editing a "mug book" (a biographical encyclopedia), for which people of small importance were persuaded to pay money to have their pictures and biographies included. He also worked for one of these "writers' institutes," which promise to turn every would-be scribbler into a Tolstoy and keep the money coming in by fulsome flattery of every submitted screed, no matter how illiterate. Later, as an established author, he drew on these experiences in lecturing to writers' groups on "literary rackets."

In the late 1920s, Pratt got a foothold as a free-lance writer. From 1929 to 1935 he sold a number of science-fiction stories to AMAZING STORIES, AMAZING STORIES QUARTERLY, *Wonder Stories*, *Wonder Stories Quarterly*, and *Science Wonder Stories*. He worked with several collaborators, notably Lawrence Manning.

During this time, Pratt worked for Hugo Gernsback, translating European science-fiction novels from the French and the German. Gernsback had a bad habit of not paying his authors what he had promised, but Pratt got around him. He would translate the first instalment or two of a European novel and then, when the material was already in print, say:

"I'm sorry, Mr. Gernsback, but if you don't pay me what you owe me, I don't see how I can complete this translation."

He had Gernsback over a barrel. He also took off more than a year to live in Paris on the insurance money that he collected after a fire gutted the Pratts' apartment. He studied at the Sorbonne and did the research for his books on codes and ciphers, *Secret and Urgent*. He learned Danish among other languages, spoke French with a terrible accent, and became friends with the curator of arms and armor at the Louvre. The curator once let him try on the armor of King Francois I, who in his day had been deemed a large, stout man. The flyweight Pratt found all the armor too small except the shoulder pieces; Francois had tremendous shoulders from working out with sword and battle ax in the tilt yard.

Back in New York, Pratt—now a self-made scholar of respectable attainments—attacked more serious writing. One early effort was *The Red King*, on Alexander's successors and especially Pyrrhos of Epeiros. Although written in a lively style and sparkling with interesting ideas, the book never sold and exists today in manuscript at the University of Syracuse. As Pratt's agent explained, a little-known author can write about a little-known historical figure, or a well-known author can write about a little-known figure, but an unknown cannot expect to sell a book about another unknown.

Soon, however, Pratt hit his stride with books like *The Heroic Years*, about the war of 1812; *The Cunning Mulatto*, a book of true crime stories; *Hail Caesar*, a biography; and *Ordeal by Fire*, a popular history of the Civil War. The last made Pratt's reputation and remained in print for decades.

The Pratt menage in New York attracted a wide circle of friends, drawn by Pratt's lavish hospitality and extraordinary sense of fun. One room of the apartment was cluttered with

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cages full of squeaking marmosets, which Pratt successfully raised by feeding them on vitamin tablets and squirming yellow larvae.

As a history, military, and naval buff, Pratt devised a naval war game, to which his friends were invited once a month. In odd moments he whittled out scale models (55 feet to the inch) of the world's warships, using balsa wood, wires, and pins, until he had hundreds of them crowding his shelves.

The game called for the players to crawl around on the floor, moving their models the distances allowed on scales marked in knots; estimating ranges in inches to the ships on which they were firing; and writing down these estimates. Then the referees chased the players off and measured the actual ranges, penalizing ships hit so many points according to the size of the shells and depriving them of so many knots of speed, so many guns, and so on. When a ship had lost all its points, it was taken from the floor. There were special provisions for merchant ships, shore batteries, submarines, torpedoes, and airplanes.

For several years, the war gamers met in the Pratts' apartment. When this became too crowded, with fifty or more players at once, the game moved to a hall on East 59th Street. After the Second World War, interest declined, perhaps because nuclear explosives made the whole thing seem too artificial. It has, however, been revived, using 1:2500 warship models made in Germany.

Others of Pratt's many interests included the reading of sagas (already mentioned), and gourmet cookery. His *A Man and His Meals* was a cookbook. He taught at the Bread Loaf Writers' Conference, was a Baker Street Irregular, and served for seven years as president of the New York Authors' Club, which collapsed when he declined to serve longer. In 1944 he founded a stag eating, drinking, and arguing society, the Trap Door Spiders, which still meets seven or eight times a year in New York.

In 1939, my old friend and college roommate, John D. Clark, introduced me to Pratt. With the appearance of Campbell's *Unknown*, Pratt conceived the idea of a series of novels, in collaboration with me, about a hero who projects himself into the parallel worlds described on this plane in myths and legends. We made our hero a brash, self-conceited young psychologist named Harold Shea.

First we sent Harold to the world of Scandinavian myth, in "The Roaring Trumpet" (*Unknown*, May, 1940) and to that of Spenser's *Faerie Queene* in "The Mathematics of Magic" (August, 1940). These novellas were combined in one cloth-bound book, *The Incomplete Enchanter* (1941). They were followed by "The Castle of Iron" (April, 1941), which took Harold to the world of Ariosto's *Orlando Furioso*. This novel did not see book publication until 1950. After the Hitlerian War, we wrote two more Shea stories, which put Harold in the world of the Finnish *Kalevala* and the world of Irish myth, with Cuchulainn and Queen Maev.

For obvious reasons, I am not in a position to assess the virtues and faults of these novels. I will only say that they were certainly heroic fantasy, or swordplay-and-sorcery fiction, long before these terms were invented.

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While Robert E. Howard is justly hailed as the main American pioneer in this genre, neither Pratt nor I, when we started the Shea stories, had ever read a Conan story or heard enough about Howard to recognize his name.

I was never so enthusiastic about the *Faerie Queene* as Pratt, finding it tedious for long stretches. When I took to writing poetry many years later, however, I composed a verse, *The Dragon-Kings*, in Spenserian nine-line stanzas. This is a very exacting verse form. Having sweated through three such stanzas, I was utterly appalled at the feat of Edmund Spenser, whose *Faerie Queene* comprises over four thousand of the damned things!

Our method of collaboration was to meet in Pratt's apartment and hammer out the plot, which I then took home in the form of an outline and wrote the rough draft. Pratt then did the final draft. Observing how useful was Pratt's knowledge of shorthand, from his journalistic days, I taught myself Gregg and have found it valuable for note-taking ever since.

During this time a fanmag asserted that, in the Harold Shea stories, de Camp furnished the imaginative element and Pratt the controlling logic. Actually, it was the other way round. Pratt had a livelier and more creative imagination than I, but I had a keener sense of critical logic. In any case, I learned much of what I think I know about the writer's craft in the course of these collaborations.

During 1941-42, Pratt and I wrote two more fantasy novels, *The Land of Unreason* and *The Carnelian Cube*, both reprinted in recent years in paperback. Although both were parallel-world stories, the first was only marginally heroic fantasy and the second not HF at all.

Pearl Harbor came just as I was finishing my part of *The Carnelian Cube*. I volunteered for the Naval Reserve, was commissioned, and spent the war doing engineering on naval aircraft at the Philadelphia Naval Base, along with Heinlein and Asimov. Pratt, kept from the armed forces by his lack of a college degree and physical limitations, wrote a war column for the New York *Post*. This ended when his editor forced him to guess wrong on the outcome of the battle of the Coral Sea. He also wrote a number of books on the war and especially the U. S. Navy's part in it.

Later, Pratt became a naval war correspondent assigned to Latin America. An old Brazilophile who spoke fluent Portuguese, Pratt visited Brazil. In Bahia, on the equator, he and a U. S. Navy captain were entertained by the local bigwigs. Pratt said:

"We were the only white men present —except the waiters. Moreover, our black hosts—politicians, poets, and intellectuals—were obviously men of culture and intelligence, while the waiters were equally obviously a lot of giggling dopes."

Pratt had long worn a mustache and in the early 1930s, for a while, a goatee. Now he grew a straggly full beard, graying reddish in color, and of Babylonian cut. He hated razors, and the Navy would not let him use his electric shaver on shipboard in the Caribbean. This was long before the revival of beards in the 1950s and 60s. His small size, whiskers, thick tinted glasses, and loud shirts made an ensemble not easily forgotten.

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After the war, Pratt returned to living in New York, while my family and I stayed in the suburbs of Philadelphia. We continued our collaboration with the two more Harold Shea novellas and the Gavagan's Bar stories, which probably owed something to Lord Dunsany's Jorkens stories for inspiration. Arthur C. Clarke was simultaneously writing his tales of the White Hart, but neither knew of the other's enterprise until it was well under way.

In the late 1940s, Pratt wrote the two novels that put him in the front rank of heroic fantasists, with knights and magic, castles and empires, wars and piracies.

The first was *The Well of the Unicorn,* published in 1948 by the short-lived firm of William Sloane Associates. Despite a handsome jacket and beautiful maps by the talented Rafael Palacios, the book had three strikes against it. One: the publishers, on the dubious theory that a writer should use different names in different genres, published the book under the pseudonym of "George U. Fletcher," thus robbing it of the benefits of Pratt's considerable literary fame. Two: not satisfied with Pratt's own brief introduction to the story, one of the editors wrote another introduction and printed it before Pratt's. This ran the whole idea of explanatory prefaces or "frames" into the ground.

Finally, there was the incomprehension of many reviewers, to whom a "real" novel must deal with the contemporary race question, or the morals of adolescents, or poverty in Appalachia. Tony Boucher, although like Pratt an admirer of the *Worm,* did not like the *Well* at all. (Neither had he any use for Conan.) Not surprisingly, the book was remaindered after a year or so. Happily, Lancer Books brought it back into print as a paperback in 1967.

Notwithstanding all this, *The Well of the Unicorn* is in most ways an excellent novel, well-wrought and entertaining, which *aficionados* ought to know as well as they know the HFs of Dunsany and Leiber.

The action takes place in Dalarna, a country resembling medieval Scandinavia. Dalarna groans under the tyranny of the Vulkings, a race-proud military caste, comparable politically to the medieval knightly orders and militarily to the Romans.

Southwest across the Blue Sea lie the main lands of the Empire, comparable to the Holy Roman one of history. The Vulkings plot to gain control of the Empire, of which they are nominal subjects. South lie the turbulent isles of the Twelve Cities, classical Greek in their politics and Renaissance (plate-armored cavalry) in their warfare. Other powers include the pirate Earl Mikalegon to the north and the blond heathen Dzik across the sea to the west.

Taxed out of his farm by the Vulkings, young Airar Alvarson joins a plot against Vulking rule. He rises to leadership, has adventures and romances, fights battles and conspiracies, learns from his errors, practices magic and has it practiced on him. He makes friends and foes: the pleasantly sinister old Doctor Meliboë the enchanter; the rough, passionate soldier-girl Evadne of Carrhoene (one of the Twelve Cities); and finally the Princess Argyra, one of the daughters of the Emperor.

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The story contains much more than derring-do. Characters argue out questions of good and evil, authority and voluntary agreement, and free will versus predestination. The central theme is the philosophy of government: how to organize men to fight effectively for freedom without losing freedom in the process? These questions are discussed with considerable subtlety, since Fletcher's sharp mind had thought much about them. He liked to call himself a political conservative; but, when one discussed some current issue with him, one found him—not exactly "liberal," whatever that may mean—but objective, disillusioned, with few prejudices and a pragmatic, "situationist" outlook.

The novel is also a warning against the solving of problems by easy answers, short cuts, or gimmicks. Airar knows magic; but, whenever he gets himself out of a jam by casting a spell, he finds in the long run that he has landed himself in a worse predicament than the one he escaped. His sorcerous friend, Meliboë, is an inveterate short-cutter. But, although Meliboë wishes his young protege' well, the wise old wizard's attempts to help Airar by enchantments likewise tend to go awry, until Airar is forced to exile his "second father" lest worse befall.

The novel has an abundance of color, movement, conflict, and intellectual stimulation. Its main weakness lies in its central characters. Airar is a tall blond, for there was a touch of Nordicism in Pratt's *Weltanschauung*. He is upright, brave, and resourceful; rather priggish and solemn; and not really very interesting despite his many interior monologues and soul-searchings. His eventual bride, Argyra, although charming and lovely, is even less developed. The best characters, as oft befalls, are minor ones: Evadne, Meliboë, Mikalegon, and Erb the Fisherman.

Moreover, in an excess of subtlety, Pratt sometimes brushed over critical events in such a brief, casual manner that the reader has to turn back the pages to try to figure out how things have come to be.

Knowing Pratt as I did, I was aware of his sources to an extent denied most readers. While writing the novel, Pratt said he was literally dreaming the episodes at night before he put them on paper. Be that as it may, the influence of *The Worm Ouroboros* is patent, and Doctor Meliboë is almost the spit and image of Doctor Vandermast in Eddison's other Zimiamvian novels. Pratt, furthermore, deliberately used, as a springboard, Dunsany's play *King Argimenes and the Unknown Warrior;* he assumed that Dunsany's Argimenes had, some generations before the time of the *Well,* founded Pratt's Empire.

Some of Pratt's characters have the same names as those in William Morris's pseudo-medieval romances, like *The Well at the World's End.* In fact, the whole idea of the well may have come from Morris. The incident of the slaying of the Vulking deserion (p. 158, 1948 ed.; p. 183, 1967 ed.) was unconsciously lifted from one of Naomi Mitchison's stories of classical Greece, as Pratt conceded to me when I pointed it out to him. Poë's tale (pp. 215ff, 1948 ed.; pp. 246ff, 1967 ed.) is based upon an actual incident that befell L. Ron Hubbard while yachting off the coast of Alaska. Hubbard, on whom the mantle of messiahship had

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not yet descended, was briefly a member of the Pratt circle around 1940.

At first, Pratt intended to bring the heathen of Dzik on stage. He explained to me: "They're really Mohammadans—very nice Mohammedans, too." As things worked out, however, he found it expedient to wind up the story before the Dzik invasion.

The archaism of the language of the *Well* seems to derive largely from Morris and Eddison. Although Pratt's English is less medieval and therefore easier to read than theirs, he does not use it with quite their skill and polish, either. Some of his sentences achieve an almost Teutonic length and complication.

Still and all, the story rates—if not at the very top of the critical scale—at least well up among tales of heroic fantasy, and far above many run-of-the-mill stories of swordplay and sorcery that have come out in the last decade as original paperbacks.

The other story, *The Blue Star,* was published by Twayne Publishers, Inc., in 1952 as the third of three novels presented in the large volume *Witches Three.* (The other two were Leiber's *Conjure Wife* and Blish's *There Shall Be No Darkness.*) The frame for this story is a Prologue, wherein three men sit of an evening, drinking and talking philosophy. They speculate about possible worlds, and that night all three dream of such a world. The dream is the story.

This time, also, Pratt has an Empire. The model, however, is the Austrian or Holy Roman Empire of the eighteenth century, say about the time of Maria Theresa. The atmosphere, with its masked balls and its noblemen attended by gangs of thugs, reminds one of Casanova's memoirs. There is not a hulking, hairy-chested, grunting barbarian in sight.

Whereas gunpowder is unknown, witchcraft works, in a complicated way. The ability is hereditary, being passed from mother to daughter. But it passes at the precise moment when the daughter is deflowered; mother loses the talent as daughter gains it.

Certain witches possess a jewel in the form of a small blue pentagram—the Blue Star of the title—worn as a pendant. Each witch lends this to her lover or mate. While he wears it, he can descry people's true emotions by looking them in the eye, but only so long as he remains faithful to his witch.

Again the hero, Rodvard Bergelin, joins a conspiracy—the Sons of the New Day—against the corrupt and tottering government of the Empress. The conspirators urge him to become the lover of a potential witch, Lalette Asterhax, because they need the talent of a Blue Star wearer in their intrigues. Neither Rodvard nor Lalette is in love with the other at first. Rodvard, a clerk in a governmental genealogical office in the capital city of Netznegon, has set his eye on a baron's daughter who visits the office. But he is bullied by his fellow conspirators into seducing Lalette. Lalette yields to escape the attentions of the brutal Count Cleudi.

Both are trapped in various plights and forced to flee, first together and then singly. Separately they voyage to the land of Mancherei. This province is under the rule of the Amorosian sect, which harps on the theme of love-love-love. The doctrines of the sect sound like a caricature of the tenets of Christian Science. Pratt, however,

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can hardly have meant it so, since he was himself a Christian Scientist. How he reconciled his constant pipe and cigar-smoking and his convivial drinking with Mrs. Eddy's strictures on liquor and tobacco ("a poisonous weed, naturally attractive only to a loathsome worm") I shall never know.

Reunited by happenstance in Mancherei, Rodvard and Lalette fell afoul of the all-powerful Amorosian priesthood. They are rescued by the Sons of the New Day; for the revolution has begun. Soon, however, the leader of the revolution, Mathurin (who had been Cleudi's valet) turns out to be a ruthless, bloodthirsty fanatic of the Robespeirre-Lenin stamp. So Rodvard and Lalette must flee again.

The novel is more pretentious but less successful than *The Well of the Unicorn*. The setting is described with vivid minuteness; nearly every piece of casual conversation throws out a flash of rich detail. This is a real achievement. As in the other novel, there are subtle disputes about morals, politics, religion, and everything else under the sun.

In fact, that is the trouble. The setting utterly overwhelms the chief characters. Whereas Airar, if a bit of a stick, is at least a resolute and competent hero, Rodvard is nearer to one of those wretched anti-heroes that make so much modern fiction dismal reading. A shy, gangling youth, well-meaning but ineffectual, with no particular skill save that of tracing noblemen's pedigrees, Rodvard accomplishes hardly anything on his own steam. Aside from escaping from a few tight fixes, he is the passive object of others' actions rather than an actor in his own right. When he does assert himself, he usually bungles. When he tries to speak, he gets only as far as "I—" before somebody interrupts.

Lalette, with her shrewish temper, is a more positive character. But she, too, accomplishes little save, by desperate sleights and shifts, to escape from encompassing perils, first from Cleudi and later from the lecherous Amorosian priests. Although some of the minor characters are vivid, most of these are singularly repulsive middle-aged and elderly women. A Doctor Remigorius plays much the same rôle as Meliboë in the *Well*, or Eddison's Vandermast, but he has a much smaller part.

Rodvard and Lalette are ever plaguet by lack of money. This was Pratt's catharsis of bitter memories of his own poverty-stricken youth.

Parenthetically, in many heroic fantasies—including these two—there is a good deal of fornication, apparently without contraception of any kind. Yet none of the women ever seems to become inopportunely pregnant.

Is *The Blue Star* worth reading? Certainly it is, and it can now be had in paperback from Ballantine. If I rate it below the *Well*, I should still place it well above many contemporary work in the genre. Pratt's stories always move right along. Something is always happening. His writing is full of novel conceits, flashes of wit, and interesting turns of phrase. And the setting is so lush and vivid that perhaps you will not mind the *morbidezza* of the leading characters.

When he had finished *The Blue Star*, Pratt told his friends that he planned a third fantasy novel. The chief char-

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acter, he said with shrewd self-judgment, would be a woman, "because I've learned that my female characters are stronger than my male ones." This woman, finding her modern life hard and feeling sorry for herself, would wake up in the body of another woman of 1,800 years ago on the German frontier of the Roman Empire. There she would learn what real hardship was.

With the approach of the Civil War centennial, however, Fletcher became so busy with better-paying non-fiction that, during his last few years, he gave up fiction altogether. He had written over fifty books, including many science-fiction stories, books on Napoleon, biographies of Edwin M. Stanton and King Valdemar IV of Denmark, a history of the U. S. Navy, and a book on codes and ciphers.

So we never had a chance to take Harold Shea to the world of Persian myth, or to write the Gavagan's Bar story about the vampire with a sweet tooth, who only attacked diabetics. And we shall never know how his Roman story would have come out. I have not tried to carry on any of our series alone, because I thought that the combination of Pratt and de Camp produced a result visibly different from the work of either of us alone.

About 1950, Pratt had one of his unlikely adventures. Having a lecture date in Boston, he reserved a compartment on the overnight train thither. (Train service had not then collasped into its present wretched state.) He and Inga boarded the train and went to bed. Pratt was dozing off when a blue-clad arm came through the curtains and shook him. A voice roared:

"Dis is de New York police! Come on out of dere! We know dere's two of you!"

Pratt climbed out into the isle in his pajamas to find, not a policeman, but a Pullman conductor, six feet something and in the 200-pound class. Pratt explained that his tickets were in order and that he and Inga had been lawfully married for twenty-odd years. The conductor kept on giving him lip. So Pratt, whose ancient skills had not deserted him, lefted the men behind the ear and knocked him down.

The conductor got up, departed vowing vengeance, and returned with a squad of policemen. Each told his tale. The cops looked up at the conductor, looked down at Pratt, and walked off laughing like hell.

In 1956, at 59, Pratt was immersed in books on the Civil War and had begund to hit the best-seller lists, when he suddenly fell ill of cancer of the liver and soon died. But *The Well of the Unicorn* and *The Blue Star* are available, and the Trap Door Spiders still meet. Both the books and the club, one may hope, will continue for a long time to come.

—L. SPRAGUE DE CAMP

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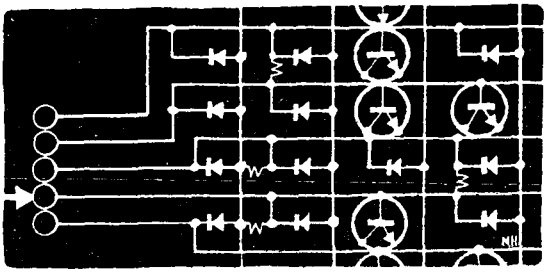
SF in Dimension



THE DOMESTICATION OF THE FUTURE (1936-1946)

IT WAS INEVITABLE that the first Golden Era of modern science fiction, that bright period of 1934 and 1935, should come to an early end, the victim of its own success. The foundation of that success was the exploration of alien realms. As alien realms were explored, one by one, it became harder to think of new ones. As they were explored, they lost their transcendence. It inevitably became necessary to fill them in with things definite, to become ever more concrete. The only concretisms that were available were those of space opera, so writers one by one turned to space opera.

In 1934, the Tremaine *Astounding*, the center of the first Golden Era, published almost no space opera. In 1936 and 1937, it was *Astounding's* chief stock in trade. Even short stories ceased to be Gernsbackian and became (for them) more imaginative—space opera. Some few stories of alien exploration did continue to be written, but they became more and more tenuous, more and more private, sillier and sillier. F. Orlin Tremaine must have wondered what had happened and been too close to the situation to know the truth of the matter.

Some measure of what happened can be seen in a series of three novels that Jack Williamson wrote during the Thirties around a set of characters who were adaptations of the Three Musketeers and Falstaff. The first, the outstandingly popular *The Legion of Space* (1934), is a story of alien exploration with a fairy-tale atmosphere. A princess-one-step-removed-from-being-a-goddess is kidnapped to an alien planet and our heroes rescue her. The second novel, *The Cometeers* (1936), is more prosaic space opera concerning a fight within our solar system against alien invaders. The third novel, *One Against the Legion* (1939), is even more conventional space opera—a battle against a super-criminal.

The space opera that took over *Astounding* was still imaginative—that is, non-realistic—but it did not stretch the imagination. As H.G. Wells had said only a few years earlier, imaginative stories that do not touch the imagination are a bore. *Astounding* in 1936 and 1937 was often a dismal bore. Its limitations can be seen in a short story by Clifton B. Kruse, "The Drums,"

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published in the March, 1936, issue, which features an evial non-transcendent alien marching Negro slaves through the jungles of Saturn.

The failure of sf in these years cannot be blamed entirely on the replacement of alien exploration stories by space opera. The space opera of 1938 and 1939, after John Campbell became editor of *Astounding* was distinctly better stuff than this. The peaks and slumps of speculative fantasy seem to be more than just a matter of internal development. They seem closely connected to culture-wide moods, to politics and economics. Sf, and the popular arts in general, seem to flourish in periods of social optimism and widespread political involvement. They falter in periods of disillusionment, despair, cynicism and withdrawal. The slump in 1936 may have been as much a result of the failure of the New Deal to end the Depression and the disillusionment with Stalinist Russia that resulted from the purge trials of 1933 and 1935, souring radical activism, as it was the product of internal weariness. We do not suggest that sf would have been the same without the work of individual writers and editors, but over and over again, as with the change from the realistic to the imaginative that occurred in the late Twenties and early Thirties, we find changes in sf paralleling changes in in other arts.

If credit for rescue of sf from its doldrums can be granted to an individual, John Campbell deserves that credit. In large part, of course, the change for the better in the last years of the Thirties was the result of Campbell's influence after F. Orlin Tremaine stepped upstairs to become editorial director of a clutch of Street and Smith magazines and Campbell became editor of *Astounding* in September 1937. But the change was implicit even earlier in eleven stories that Campbell had published under the name of Don A. Stuart.

The first Don A. Stuart story was "Twilight," published in the November 1934 issue of *Astounding*. It was actually written two years earlier, but it was so different from anything being published at the time that it went unbought until Tremaine became editor of *Astounding*. Him it delighted. The story was pure mood, a vision of the late afternoon of the human race, following in the footsteps of H.G. Wells in *The Time Machine*. While hundreds of stories had been written after the Wells of the early short stories, this was something new in science fiction. The story was loved. It was easily the most popular story of its issue.

Campbell was thus encouraged to experiment. He did continue to write space opera under his own name after one last alien exploration novel, *The Mightiest Machine*, published concurrently with Doc Smith's last alien exploration novel, *The Skylark of Valeron*, in *Astounding* at the end of 1934. But Campbell recognized the limitations of space opera and of ever larger space battles, while Smith did not. Smith expanded into the superspace opera of the Lensman series. Campbell traded size for discipline and variety and experiment as a principle—a completely individual approach to speculative fantasy that produced stories like "Night", "Forgetfulness" and "Who Goes There?".

The Mightiest Machine was the only story under Campbell's own name ever to appear in *Astounding*, although he

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edited the magazine from 1937 to 1971. All his best work in the later Thirties—generally imaginative without falling into any of the conventional complexes, varied, concrete, and different from anything else then being written—was published in *Astounding* under the Don A. Stuart name. There were two stories in 1934, six in 1935, two in 1936, two in 1937, two in 1938, and two in 1939, one of them a short novel written to fill a hole in Campbell's new magazine, *Unknown*. After that, with new writers coming to *Astounding* who could respond to Campbell's ideas and follow his direction, he devoted his full energies to editing and ceased to write fiction.

The level of writing in the Stuart stories was at first only a little better than the writing in earlier Campbell. It was still often clumsy and agrammatical. The later Stuart stories, however, were as well-written as the best *Astounding* material of the Forties. The sensibility behind Stuart/Campbell was far more mature than the gauche sensibility of the young planet-busting Campbell. Stuart was a far more aesthetic writer than the heavily didactic young Campbell. But the true overwhelming virtue of the Stuart stories was their concreteness. In place of the rote specificities of melodramatic space opera, Campbell-as-Stuart produced new original self-consistent imaginative detail in one story after another. His invented worlds had their own integrity. His invented cultures had their own truth. And this was new to modern sf.

When Campbell, as editor of *Astounding*, could get other writers to do for him what he had been able to do for himself only at the slow pace of two novelets a year, it was no longer necessary for him to write, and rather more fruitful for him to encourage and suggest. The result was sf of a new sort. As Campbell said, with accuracy, of "Twilight"—"It led to the development of the Don A. Stuart stories, and thus to the modern *Astounding*."

Campbell did not assume full control of *Astounding* until May 1938 when Tremaine, who had been his editor-in-chief, left Street and Smith, but even in the first months of his editorship, Campbell made changes in the magazine. He changed the name from *Astounding Stories* to *Astounding Science-Fiction*. He spruced up the table of contents by eliminating the story blurbs beneath each title. He commissioned astronomical paintings to give his covers more-than-pulpish dignity. And he began to run serial novels in four or even three installments, rather than in the six or seven brief parts that had been Tremaine's practice.

In his first few years as editor, Campbell continued to emphasize space opera in *Astounding*, but it was space opera with a difference, space opera that reflected the influence of Don A. Stuart. Campbell wanted detail and a concern for consequence in the fiction that he printed, not private mystical vision or pulp melodramatics. Writers either adapted or were replaced. Alien exploration stories, now grown tenuous or fuzzy, were swept out of the magazine. Space opera in the style of Hawk Carse or of Kruse's "The Drums" found no welcome.

At its worst, Campbell's new style of space opera meant stories about Scottish spaceship engineers cursing, coaxing and conjuring the power for one last run to Mars out of their bat-

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tered old freighters. Constricted though this might be, it was less constricted than stories of Saturnians foiling Venusian plots, and it was rather more popular with the readers of *Astounding*. It was also indicative of the new direction of the magazine.

Campbell began to replace the mainstays of the Tremaine *Astounding*, writers like Raymond Z. Gallun, Warner van Lorne and John Russell Fearn, with writers of his own. He made frequent editorial comment about his new writers and promised more. The Class of 1937 was Eric Frank Russell and L. Sprague de Camp. The Class of 1938 was Lester del Rey, Malcolm Jameson, L. Ron Hubbard, and a Clifford Simak who had made the briefest excursion into sf some years before. The Class of 1939, the most brilliant and successful of them all, was Isaac Asimov, A.E. van Vogt, Robert Heinlein, and Theodore Sturgeon. And Campbell multiplied their impact—and the apparent effectiveness of his campaign for new blood—by publishing their work under a variety of pseudonyms. By 1940, the old writers were all but gone—with the immediate notable exceptions of Doc Smith and Jack Williamson, and later of C.L. Moore and Murray Leinster—and these new men dominated *Astounding*. By 1941, following in the van of Heinlein, they were producing work of an order previously unknown to science fiction.

In addition to highly concretized space opera—imaginative sf—Campbell printed more realistic stories of inventions and disasters in the Gernsback mode. Lester del Rey's "Helen O'Loy" (December 1938), a sentimental story of a female robot's love affair with a human, is one example. So is all of L. Sprague de Camp's early work for *Astounding*, like "Hyperpilosity" (April 1938), in which the human race grows hairy, and "The Command" (October 1938), in which an intelligent bear named Johnny Black saves the world. Heinlein's first story, "Life-Line" (August 1939), and Sturgeon's first story, "Ether Breather" (September 1939), were both neo-Gernsbackian.

There are differences between this work and the fiction printed in AMAZING ten years earlier. In part, the difference is the result of the example of all the stories printed in the interim, including several Don A. Stuart stories in this vein. Writers necessarily learned from their predecessors' successes and failures. In part, the difference is Campbell's consistent demand for detail and consequence. Contrary to Gernsback, Campbell was interested in story first and invention second, rather than in invention as an end in itself. And, in part, the difference is the discovery, made about this time, that a well-characterized, throughly concretized, realistic near-future world provides a stronger context for powers invented or unleashed than does the present. As Campbell said in 1947, "In older science fiction, the Machine and the Great Idea predominated. Modern readers—and hence editors!—don't want that; they want stories of people living in a world where a Great Idea, or a series of them, and a Machine, or machines, form the background. But it is the man, not the idea or machine that is the essence." Any world in which a Machine or a Great Idea forms the background must necessarily be displaced—slightly, or more than slightly, from the present.

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"Helen O'Loy" is a good early example. It is set in the near future. Scattered through the story, used casually but consistently, not explained, most definitely not footnoted, are a dozen measures of difference: "cuproberyl", "rubberite", "ion rockets", "the pneumatic", and so on. Used in the context of other known things, their meaning becomes clear. This technique, employed most skillfully by Heinlein, became the standard method of characterizing the near future for the following twenty years.

Again, the trend within *Astounding* in the late Thirties, away from the alien exploration complex to space opera and to the realistic and the concrete, was not an isolated phenomenon. It had its parallels in other popular media. *Life* and *Look*, photo-records of contemporary living, were established in 1936 and 1937. *Terry and the Pirates*, in the early Thirties a sketchily-drawn Oriental adventure comic strip, became more dense, more realistic, and involved in the coming Pacific war. Superman and Batman, domestic superheroes, appeared in the comic books. Movie cartoons, plastic and imaginative in the early Thirties, took on tight definition—Walt Disney's *Snow White* (1937) is far more realistic and concrete than the Betty Boop cartoons or Disney's early Silly Symphonies in which anything was free to become anything. Popular novels took a domestic turn. John Marquand, with his stories of businessmen, Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath*, and Christopher Morley's *Kitty Foyle*, the story of a working girl, took the place of more imaginative books like *Gone With the Wind*. Musical comedy—more show than story—traded looseness and imagination for greater realism in plays like *Pal Joey* (1940) and *Oklahoma* (1943)—though this change came somewhat later than the others named.

Sensibility was changing and sf was affected. John Campbell's true strength may have been a sensitivity to the mood of the time.

The difference between the old sensibility and the new was even more strongly apparent in *Unknown*, the new Street and Smith fantasy magazine, than in *Astounding*. In announcing the new magazine in the February 1939 issue of *Astounding*, Campbell said: "A year ago when I took over *Astounding*, with a background of writing in the field, I knew the accepted code of things that were liked and things that weren't. I did not believe in that code. 'Science fiction readers don't like fantasy. Don't print it...' No, it isn't fantasy you dislike; it seems it had been the quality of the fantasy that you have read in the past that has made the very name anathema... *Unknown* will be to fantasy what *Astounding* has made itself represent to science-fiction. It will offer fantasy of a quality so far different from that which has appeared in the past as to change your entire understanding of the field."

What fantasy did Campbell assume his readers did not like? The obvious answer is the fantasy published in *Weird Tales*, the major contemporary source of new stories employing traditional symbols. Like the fiction of the Tremaine *Astounding*, the fantasy published in *Weird Tales* in the early middle Thirties was aesthetic and imaginative, and if anything has lasted better. Also, like the Tremaine *Astounding*, *Weird Tales* fell into doldrums after 1936, but we can assume

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that this is not the failure in quality to which Campbell was referring.

It seems more likely that Campbell meant a quality of texture rather than absolute goodness and badness. For readers as concerned with plausibility and science as the heirs of Gernsback, the lack of rigor in the abracadabra of *Weird Tales* must have been distinctly off-putting. Rather more serious, many readers shared the attitude of William H. Dellenbeck in a letter printed in the 1934 *Astounding:* "Science fiction idealizes much that is high; weird fiction emphasizes horror, grotesqueness, perverseness and fear of the unknown." (That is, the fiction in *Weird Tales* emphasized sex and ended unhappily.) The fans of positive idealists like E.E. Smith and John Campbell couldn't enjoy stuff like that.

But Campbell thought there was something in fantasy that his readers could enjoy, and he meant to tailor fantasy until they could enjoy it. His own late Don A. Stuart story, "Who Goes There?" (August 1938), had presented a shape-changing alien creature very much out of traditional fantasy, but with none of the aura of perversity of weird fiction. And he had rationalized the alien by "science" rather than magic.

Campbell made the fantasy he printed in *Unknown* acceptable to the readers of *Astounding* by purging it of weirdness, and by providing it with firm rules. Only the rarest untypical story had more than a hint of creepy-crawliness. More important, Campbell took *Unknown* in the same direction as *Astounding,* and a bit further, in demanding detail and consequence. He demythified magic. He reduced magic to another kind of science-beyond-science. *Unknown,* dependent on stories of power, became even more realistic, more concretized and more didactic than *Astounding.*

Traditional alien realms like the world of the Arabian Nights or the world of Norse mythology were used, but they were almost always ventured into from modern America, and when they were reached, they were concretized until they lost their transcendence and became merely imaginative backgrounds for stories of powers. Alien beings—witches, wizards, devils, demons, ghouls, elves, brownies, leprechauns, jinns, spirits and gods—were common stuff in *Unknown,* but they were either reduced to mere bearers of power, or they were kept weak and well-bounded by being set against highly realistic contemporary backgrounds, or often both. New York City and boarding houses were as central to the spirit of *Unknown* as demons and leprechauns. Powers were treated as the purely logical outcome of unfamiliar natural laws, and placed in the hands of common twentieth century working stiffs, or adventurous professors, or the patrons of dusty bookstores.

The contrast between traditional symbols and contemporary people permitted a variety of didactic effects, chiefly civilized muted horror and humorous anachronism. No sensationalism, however, and very little sentimentality. *Unknown* was the magazine that asked what would *homo Americanus* 1940 do if someone gave him three wishes? How would a genuine witch—nice, of course, and conventionally pretty—practice in a modern city? What would Joe Normal do if he were suddenly transferred from here to

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a magical elsewhere?

Altogether, there were thirty-nine issues of *Unknown* published between March 1939 and October 1943, when the World War II paper shortage caused the death of the magazine. The strength of *Unknown* was in its novels and short novels, at least twenty-seven of which have since been reprinted. Campbell relied chiefly on his new *Astounding* talents to fill the pages of *Unknown*. Some of them—Hubbard, de Camp and Sturgeon, for instance—did rather better work for *Unknown*.

De Camp, in particular, in spite of his two engineering degrees, was clearly more comfortable putting characters through comic paces in magical places in *Unknown* than in inventing small-scale "scientific" comic disasters in *Astounding*. His work for *Unknown* was far more original than his work for *Astounding*. Because the subject matter of *Unknown* was magic, there was a natural lightness to the magazine, a lack of earnestness, a willingness to be purely entertaining. *Astounding*, as paramount heir to the traditions of Gernsback, was aware of its responsibilities to educate, and tended to bring out the latent gravity in a man. Since de Camp's natural vice was gravity and the responsibility of being responsible froze his imagination, he and *Astounding* were not good for each other. On the other hand, in *Unknown*, he published his best novel, *Lest Darkness Fall*, and with Fletcher Pratt and by himself he wrote a remarkable series of novels about a variety of alternate universes existing parallel to our own. This elaborated on the idea of Leinster's 1934 *Astounding* story, "Sidewise in Time" and laid the groundwork—provided the play space—for many subsequent stories.

Sturgeon has always been more of a short story writer than a novelist, and wrote no novels for either *Unknown* or *Astounding*. His first story for *Astounding* was near-future realism, but after that, except for "Microcosmic God" (April 1941), his main work for *Astounding* was conventional and unexciting space opera. His stories for *Unknown* were distinctly better—more original, more effective. Sturgeon has only rarely left the security of realistic settings from the beginning of his career to the present. Since realistic settings were the basic stuff of *Unknown*, he was thoroughly at home there in a way he never was in *Astounding*.

Sturgeon's chief distinction is that he was the first stylist of modern speculative fantasy. Heinlein, beginning at the same time as Sturgeon, had a distinct way with words, a style that stamped his work, under whatever pseudonym, as his own and no one else's. This, in its own way, was also an exception to the gray world of sf prose. But Sturgeon was a stylist, a writer with natural grace who could make words do whatever he wanted of them. The importance of his example far outweighs the importance of any particular story by Sturgeon, even though his 1953 novel, *More Than Human*, won the International Fantasy Award, and even though Sturgeon has been, along with Asimov, one of the most frequently anthologized writers of modern sf.

Unknown was consistent entertaining good fun, and it has had some continuing influence on modern sf, but ultimately it was no more than an appendage to *Astounding* through the early years of its second and greater Golden Age. All the force and excitement and

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the sense of being in the fore of a developing tradition were in *Astounding*. *Unknown*, by comparison, was too realistic, too circumscribed, too familiar, too light, too unserious. *Unknown* was a known quantity. *Astounding* was more original, more imaginative, and held the constant promise of surprise. *Astounding* was engaged in inventing the future.

The chief architect of this great works project was Robert Heinlein, who to this day is the most dominating talent that science fiction has yet produced. Heinlein's first few stories were not obviously special—one near-future invention story, and two highly concretized space operas. Then, in 1940, he began to build momentum. Nothing he did that year compared in impact to A.E. van Vogt's novel, *Slan*, but Heinlein had more stories in *Astounding* than any other writer and was clearly emerging as the strongest of Campbell's new writers. In 1941, he came into his own. Campbell had begun to list stories in past issues in order of their reader popularity. Heinlein appeared in eight issues of *Astounding* in 1941, and his stories were rated first eight times and second—to himself—four more times. Two other stories were rated third and fourth in their issues, again to other Heinlein firsts. Heinlein is so large and overwhelming a figure that it is a temptation to see him as the whole sum total of this Golden Age in himself. He was not —not quite. Heinlein went off to war at the end of 1941 and the Golden Age continued without him. But Heinlein was King of the Mountain in 1941. In July, only two years after the appearance of his first story, Heinlein was Guest of Honor at the Third World Science Fiction Convention in Denver.

Heinlein was a naval officer, an engineer, who had been retired in 1934 when he developed tuberculosis. He had relapsed while he was in graduate school and had moved to Colorado. Between 1934 and 1939, he worked in silver mining, sold real estate, played with architecture, and tried politics, and only finally turned to writing science fiction. He was a practical man with a natural gift for narrative and a wide range of knowledge. He was exactly the right man to answer John Campbell's hunger for detail. He and *Astounding* were made for each other.

Heinlein produced a wide variety of fiction for *Astounding*. Some stories were late excursions into the materials of Thirties sf. "Elsewhere" (September 1941—by Caleb Saunders) was an alien exploration story. "By His Bootstraps" (October 1941—by Anson MacDonald) was an epitomal time travel paradox story. "Goldfish Bowl" (March 1942—by Anson MacDonald) was an improved concretization of the superior-aliens-discovered-among us theme. It was as though Heinlein picked up this old stuff, tried it once to see if he could do it himself, generally did it better, and then put it aside. A number of other stories were nearfuture neo-Gernsbackian accounts of the impact of inventions on society—"The Roads Must Roll" (June 1940); "Solution Unsatisfactory" (May 1941—as Anson MacDonald); "Waldo" (August 1942—as Anson MacDonald; Heinlein's last story for *Astounding* until 1949). Heinlein had an natural flair for this. He liked to know how things—inventions and societies—perform, and he took pleasure in putting them together to see what might happen. He

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published a very few space operas, subdued and highly concretized, for instance, "Requiem" (January 1940), and "Logic of Empire" (March 1941). Finally, there were a number of imaginative stories set in futures some distance from us—"Universe" (May 1941); *Methuselah's Children* (July-September 1941); and *Beyond This Horizon* (April-May 1942—as Anson MacDonald).

He was not and is not a writer without flaw. Perhaps his most crippling weakness is his distrust of transcendence. He buries it, disguises it, looks away from it. We see the aliens of "Goldfish Bowl" no more than we see the aliens of *2001*. The protagonist of "By His Bootstraps" gets but one fleeting glance at another alien and the experience turns his hair white and breaks his nerve. Transcendence is present in Heinlein's speculative fantasy. He simply has never wanted to believe in its central importance. He has considered fantasy and science fiction as separate. To him, science fiction is possible, fantasy impossible. Heinlein considers science fiction mimetic stuff, the futuristic brother of historical fiction and of fiction set in the contemporary world. This mistake is the Gernsback Delusion come back to haunt speculative fantasy one more time. That it did not ruin Heinlein was due to two factors. First, he came to sf at a time when the most pressing need was not for the invention of new effective transcendent symbols, but for the supporting symbols to surround transcendence—and Heinlein was a whiz at pouring out imaginative-but-highly-concretized supporting symbols. Better than Lester del Rey. Better than anybody. And second, though Heinlein may believe that the transcendence in his stories is garnish, he still has presented transcendence.

Heinlein's great contribution to the continuing development of sf became apparent in 1941. It was a new complex, far richer than space opera, and Heinlein named it—future history. In the May issue of *Astounding*, John Campbell published a chart by Heinlein that showed that all of the stories that had appeared in *Astounding* under Heinlein's own name fit into a single picture extending six hundred years and more into the future.

The idea was not wholly new. It may well have been derived from Olaf Stapledon, who, along with J.R.R. Tolkien and to a lesser extent, Aldous Huxley and George Orwell, is one of the few outside writers to have influence on the development of science fiction. Stapledon's novel, *Odd John* (1935), is an early and powerful superman story. However, rather more important to modern speculative fantasy have been two other books, *Last and First Men* (1930) and *Star Maker* (1937), neither a novel by any conventional definition, and neither immediately approachable by the casual reader. They might be described as fictional speculative philosophical essays, or as Stapledon called them, myths:

"Yet our aim is not merely to create aesthetically admirable fiction. We must achieve neither mere history, nor mere fiction, but myth. A true myth is on which, within the universe of a certain culture (living or dead), expresses richly, and often perhaps tragically, the highest admirations possible within that culture. A false myth is one which either violently transgresses the limits of credibility set by its own

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cultural matrix, or expresses admirations less developed than those of its culture's best vision. This book can no more claim to be true myth than true prophecy. But it is an essay in myth creation."

That is from the preface to *Last and First Men,* which is an account of the future of man through eighteen metamorphoses over the course of two billion years. The scale of *Star Maker,* an account of the varieties and destiny of intelligence in the universe, makes even these two billion years infinitesimal. Stapeldon said of it: "...I have tried to construct an imaginative sketch of the dread but vital whole of things. I know well that it is a ludicrously inadequate and in some ways a childish sketch, even when regarded from the angle of contemporary human experience. In a calmer and a wiser age it might well seem crazy. Yet in spite of its crudity, and in spite of its remoteness, it is perhaps not wholly irrelevant."

It is not irrelevant at all. It is not irrelevant to our society. Whether or not these visions are true myth, they do express "higher admirations" than anything our culture is used to hearing. More narrowly, these two books have suggested much to modern speculative fantasy and their potential has been far from exhausted. They are mines of science fiction "ideas".

Heinlein's future history, whether or not influenced by Stapledon, presented in a series of fictions the premise, basic to Stapledon, that the future would be continuous with the past. In earlier sf, like Williamson's *The Legion of Space,* the future had been a single nebulous locale. The future was an undifferentiated place. Heinlein made the future a series of moments.

Heinlein's great discovery was that the supporting symbols for more distant futures could be invented and concretized exactly in the same way as the symbols for the near futures that he and others were growing used to writing. A future unlike any present actuality—including a society on a spaceship to the stars that has forgotten its purposes and thinks its small world is the whole of creation—could be extrapolated from the present by a series of plausible and acceptable steps. This was more than a perfect alternative to space opera. It absorbed space opera and reduced it to one moment among many moments in the future development of man.

Heinlein's chart crammed all the stories published under his name in *Astounding* into the frame of a single future. The stories didn't fit comfortably into that single future. Most probably, they were not originally conceived as fitting into a single future. The chart seems a sudden insight, the brilliant inevitable conclusion that yes, the future *would* have shape and change and history. The stories forced into the iron framework of the chart were examples of the variety of *Astounding:* neo-Gernsbackian invention stories, space opera, a first short novel set in a nebulous romantic future mere 150 years from now), plus later less romantic but more highly detailed stories of a farther future. They were not alike. They were made alike by the structure of the chart, and God have mercy upon them.

Heinlein had one further insight. He saw that his Future History was an artistic rigidity, misshapen from the first, doomed to do him harm if he forced himself to continue to write to its dic-

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tates, but that the insight of future history was endlessly viable. His most successful and impressive future history story in these early days was his final novel, *Beyond This Horizon,* published in *Astounding* after he had left for the war. This was no part of his official Future History. (He abandoned that except for a few minor short stories after the war.) This was an Anson MacDonald story, and it demonstrated the true vitality of the complex. It showed that future history was not one man's property, his patented party trick, but that a multiplicity of futures, each derived plausivly and concretely from the present, could be invented. Not only could be invented, but must inevitably be invented.

This discovery was not immediately acted upon. With the coming of the war, the solid core of *Astounding's* new talent abruptly ceased to write. Not only Heinlein, but Sturgeon, de Camp, and Hubbard. The Golden Age did not end. Good work continued to be written. Campbell brought more new writers into the magazine, less brilliant than Heinlein, but solid dependable men: George O. Smith, Raymond F. Jones, Fritz Leiber. Rather more notably, Campbell brought Murray Leinster, published in AMAZING in 1926 and in *Astounding* in 1930, back into the magazine and Leinster began to produce work more original than any he had previously done. Campbell also brought back C.L. Moore, who had written for the Tremaine *Astounding,* but very little for him, and her husband, Henry Kuttner, who had done one story for Campbell in 1938 and a few stories for *Unknown,* but who was generally a hack for the minor magazines. Chiefly under their common pseudonym of Lewis Padgett they became one of the strengths of *Astounding* during the war years and after. These replacement writers may have felt there were other directions than future history to be explored. Or the true vitality of Heinlein's insight may not have been immediately apparent. More likely, uncertainty about the shape of any future, generated by the war, was the determining factor.

Whatever the reasons, from 1942 throught 1944, sf in *Astounding* was either highly concretized invention stories—including many technological space operas—or it was highly imaginative romances set in indeterminate futures with no reasonable connection to our present. Both might fairly be called forms of escape. That is, they were either excessively didactic or excessively aesthetic with none of the meeting ground they might have found in future history if the idea of future history had not been for the moment insupportable. George O. Smith's popular Venus Equilateral series—stories about characters who are obviously smooth-shorn 1940-type American-boy engineers involved to the exclusion of all else in problems of interplanetary radio transmission—were an avoidance of feeling. A.E. van Vogt's popular Weapon Shops stories—the chronicle of the eternal struggle of the Isher Empire, ruled by the Empress Innelda, the one thousand one hundred eightieth of her line, against the Weapon Shops of Isher ("The Right to Buy Weapons Is the Right to Be Free"), seven thousand years in the future—were an avoidance of thought. Until 1945, there was little sf that combined thought and feeling.

During these war years, the strongest

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writer in *Astounding* was A.E. van Vogt. Van Vogt is Heinlein's polar opposite. He was a most strange writer to have appeared in this period of the development of supporting symbols. He has no talent for them at all. Many of his stories, including the most affecting, when viewed closely fall to pieces. His writing is crude—insensitive, lacking in grace, and often vague. His plots are complex, but when the whirlwinds cease, ultimately nonsensical. His characters are murkily motivated and inconsistent cardboard figures. Detail, Heinlein's strength, is van Vogt's weakness. His notion of extrapolation is to have a secret police chief in a future divided from our present by 1500 years of chaos drive the streets in a Studebaker. As early as 1945, Damon Knight published a devastating attack on van Vogt and his novel, *The World of Null-A* (*Astounding*, August-October 1945), the power of which even van Vogt has admitted. Knight exposed van Vogt's intellectual poverty and the technical ineptitude of his fiction. All true. All true. But somehow, van Vogt did not immediately roll over dead when his failings were demonstrated. His strength is his transcendent symbols, the ultimate meanings of his stories. He slapped words down on paper, but he did communicate emotion and he moved readers. In the Fifties, when the demand for plausible and consistent supporting symbols was at its height, van Vogt ceased to write, but in the Forties, and particularly during the war years, his aesthetic highly imaginative stories suited tastes.

The next major essay into future history, as important in its own way as Heinlein's, was undertaken by Isaac Asimov. Although Asimov had first appeared in *Astounding* in 1939, in the same issue as van Vogt's first story and one month before Heinlein, he had not been as important as either to the first phase of Campbell's Golden Age. He had been an infrequent contributor to *Astounding*, and he had written no novels. His most powerful and best received story was the novelet "Nightfall" (September 1941), from an idea suggested by Campbell—that if Emerson's line came true and the stars appeared only one night in a thousand years, men would not "believe and adore, and preserve for many generations the remembrance of the city of God"; they would go berserk. Other than this, he was chiefly known for a series of stories in *Astounding* and elsewhere that postulated "Three Laws of Robotics" governing the behavior of robots and then presented apparent failures of these laws. Asimov was and has remained a solid craftsman of overwhelmingly didactic stories, generally told in a stolid gray prose. His natural affinities are with the old-fashioned cerebral story of formal detection—Sherlock Holmes and his descendants. Rather than emotion, his stories depend on the solution of a mystery or of an intellectual problem—like the seeming violation of a law of robotics.

In 1944 and 1945, Asimov picked up a series he had begun in *Astounding* in 1942 and dropped after two closely-connected novelets, "Foundation" (May 1942) and "Bridle and Saddle" (June 1942). The Foundation series carries Heinlein's idea of the future history of mankind 40,000 years beyond us in one great leap and spreads mankind over 25,000,000 inhabited planets under the direction of a single Galactic

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Empire. The concept of structure is extended from time to the ordering of almost indigestibly large areas of space. The transcendent symbol of the early stories of the series is structure itself—"psychohistory", mathematically determined history-beyond-history. The readers of *Astounding* were properly impressed.

As with many innovations in sf, the details of Asimov's Empire were borrowed from the nearest available model—in this case, the Roman Empire in decline. In one story, the short novel "Dead Hand" (April 1945), the transcription of detail even extends to an adaptation of a historical personage, Belisarius, the underappreciated genius general of Justinian. Nontheless, the significance of these stories is undeniable. With this series, the new lands glimpsed in one whole by Smith's *Skylark III* in 1930 in its passage outside the galaxy, and mastered by the alien explorers and space opera heroes who came after, were domesticated, tamed and put under political order.

This was an important moment. It made so permanent an impression that in 1966 the Foundation stories were presented a special retrospective Hugo award as the most significant science fiction series ever to have been published. These stories mark the end of the first era of science fiction, punctuated by Hiroshima in August 1945 and the publication of the first giant science fiction anthologies in 1946.

—ALEXEI & CORY PANSHIN

WHO'S AFRAID (continued from page 77)

We ran on; I do not think they knew that I was leading them rather than being pursued. I could tell by their breathing that they were tiring. That was good, for I was still full of energy, and the more tired they became the better chance I would have with my plan.

We had been running down quiet residential streets for such a long time that I hoped they were not prepared for what I intended. I was leading them towards Sutter Street, which I knew would be busy even on Sunday night, the busiest street in the area. I ran onto the sidewalk.

And suddenly Sutter was ahead of us. There is always traffic on Sutter, even in the early morning. I saw several cars pass the intersection as we approached. I would have to be quick, and I would be putting myself in danger, but I had no other choice. The two were a virus to be scientifically islolated and removed. My transformations had to continue unhampered. I slowed a bit, to let them catch up, until they were right behind me and I could hear them gasping and panting. I turned onto Sutter, running on the sidewalk, making sure that they followed closely, at my tail. I looked for an opportunity. Then I saw a space between two speeding cars, and I ran into it, and through.

I heard brakes squealing and tires skidding, and I heard a thump and a crash, as the car hit them both, swerved, and stopped up against a lamppost. I stayed only for a moment. They had resumed their human shapes, and they were dead, smashed and broken by the car: a man and a woman. My plan had worked. I was alone.

Exhausted, I went home. I opened the back door and crept up the stairs. The door to my parents' room was open. The beds were undisturbed and my parents were not inside. The pill bottle, sitting on my father's bedside table, was empty.

—CALVIN DEMMON

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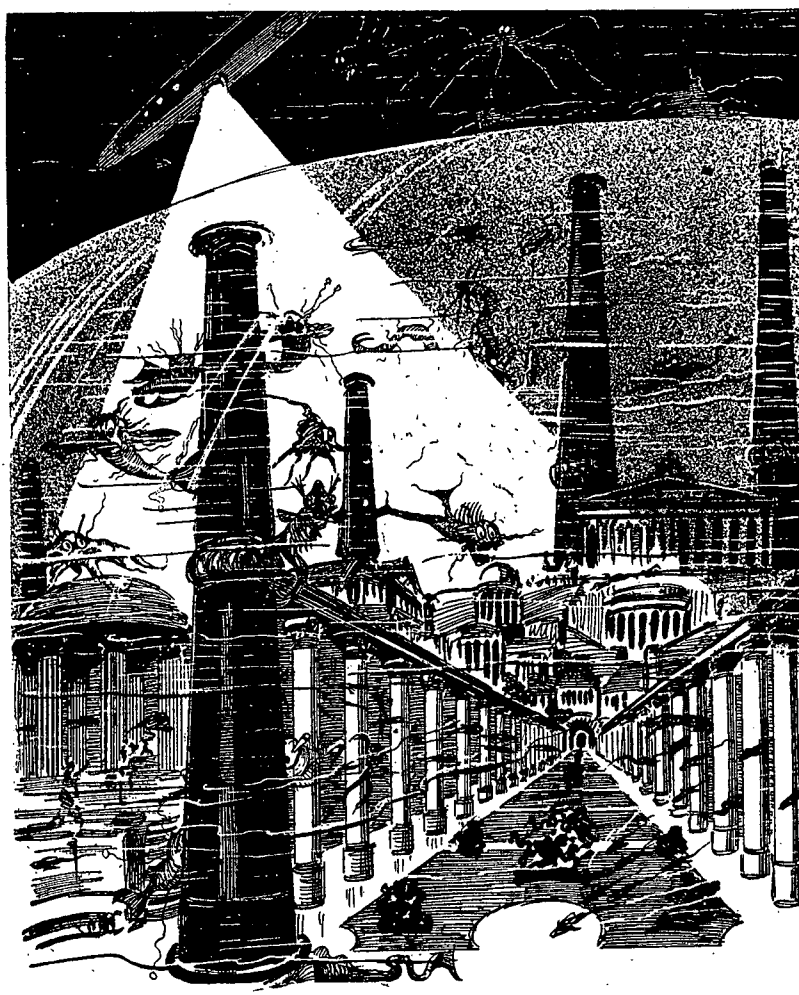
PORTFOLIO:

FRANK R. PAUL

THE SUNKEN WORLD

by STANTON A. COBLENTZ



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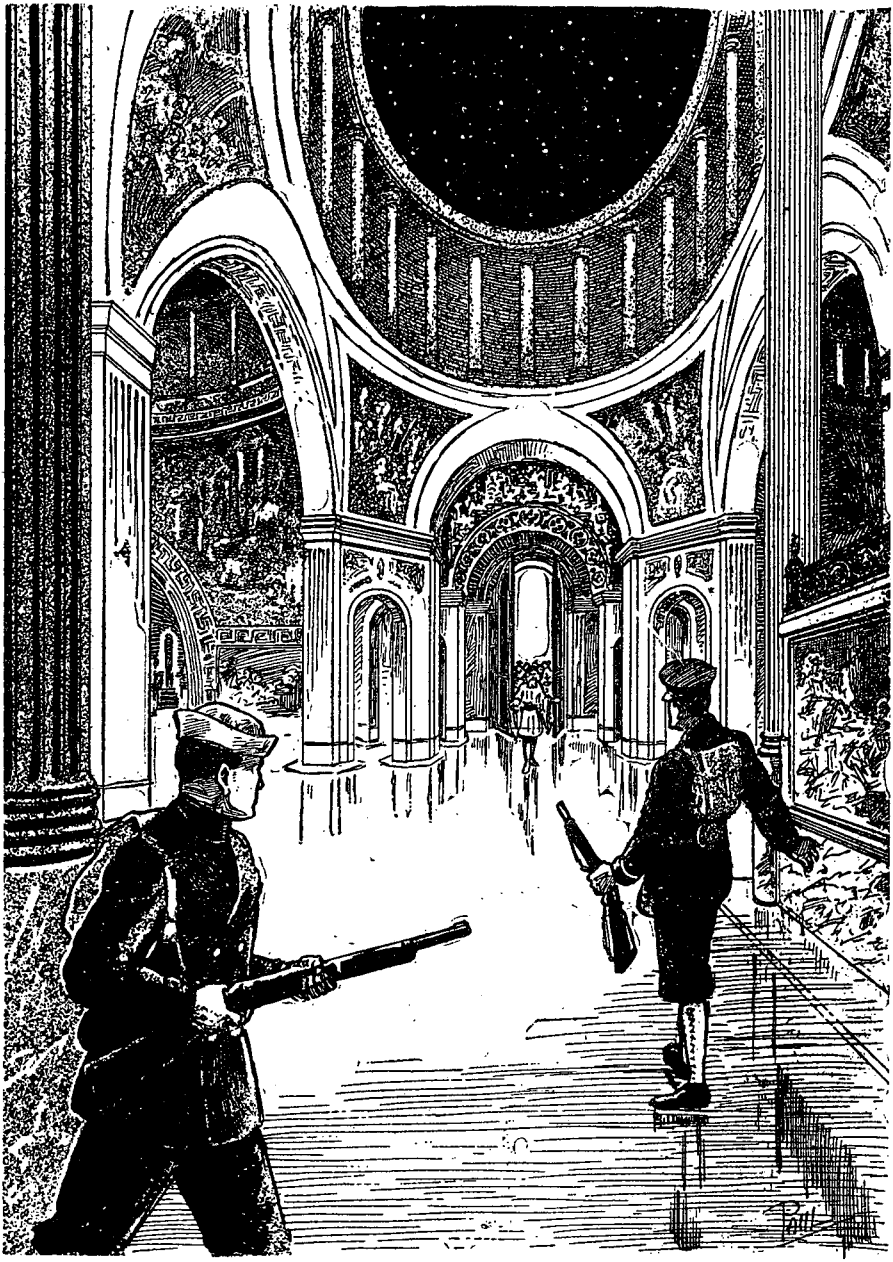

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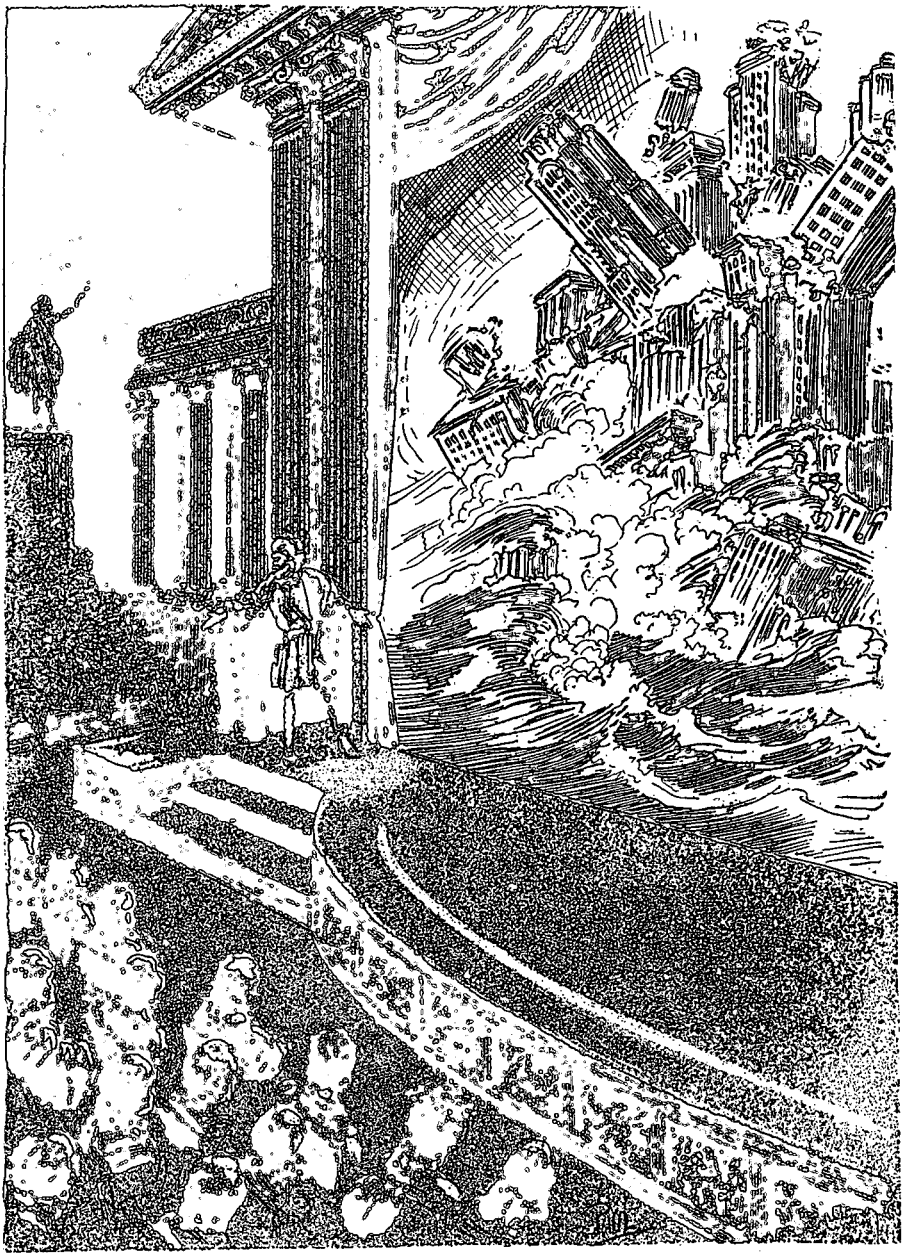

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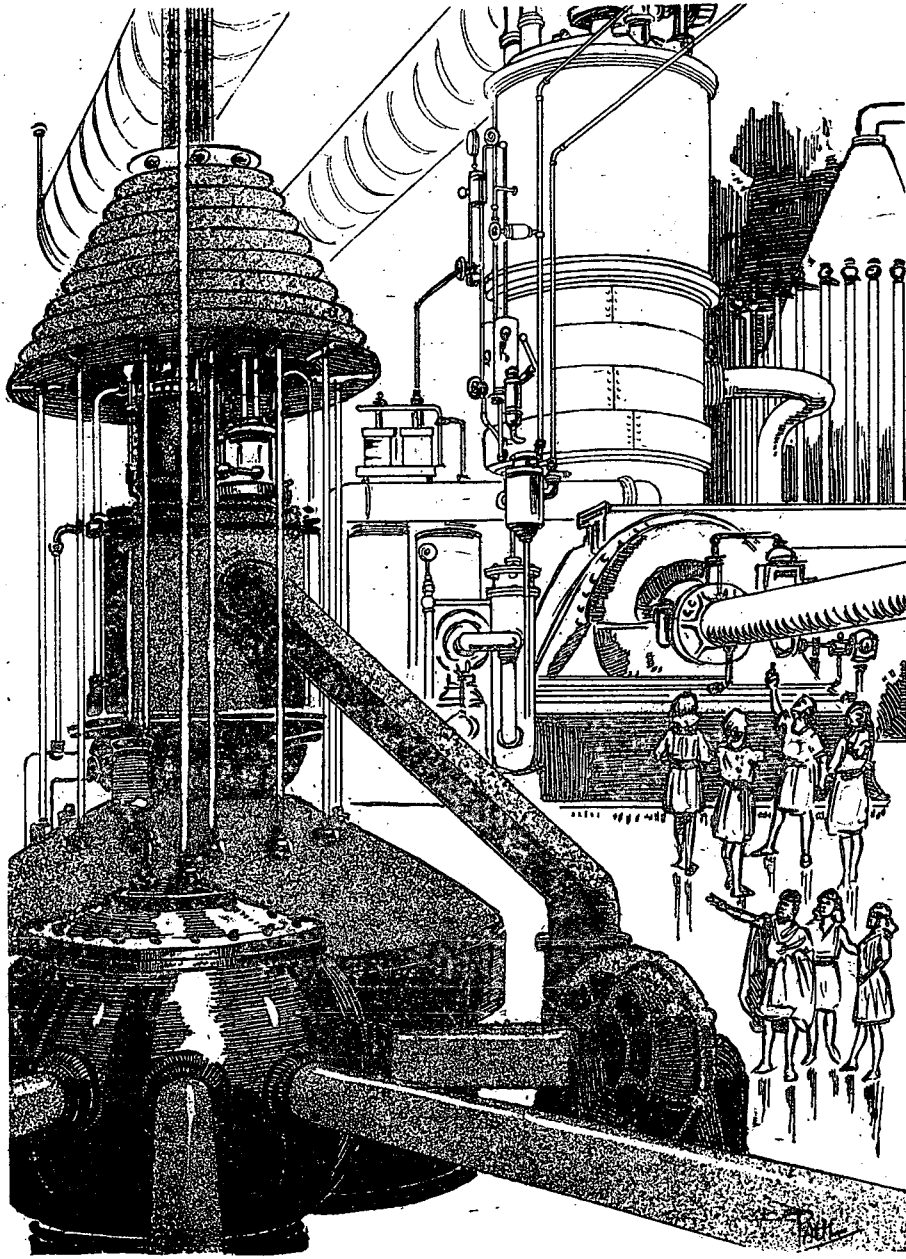

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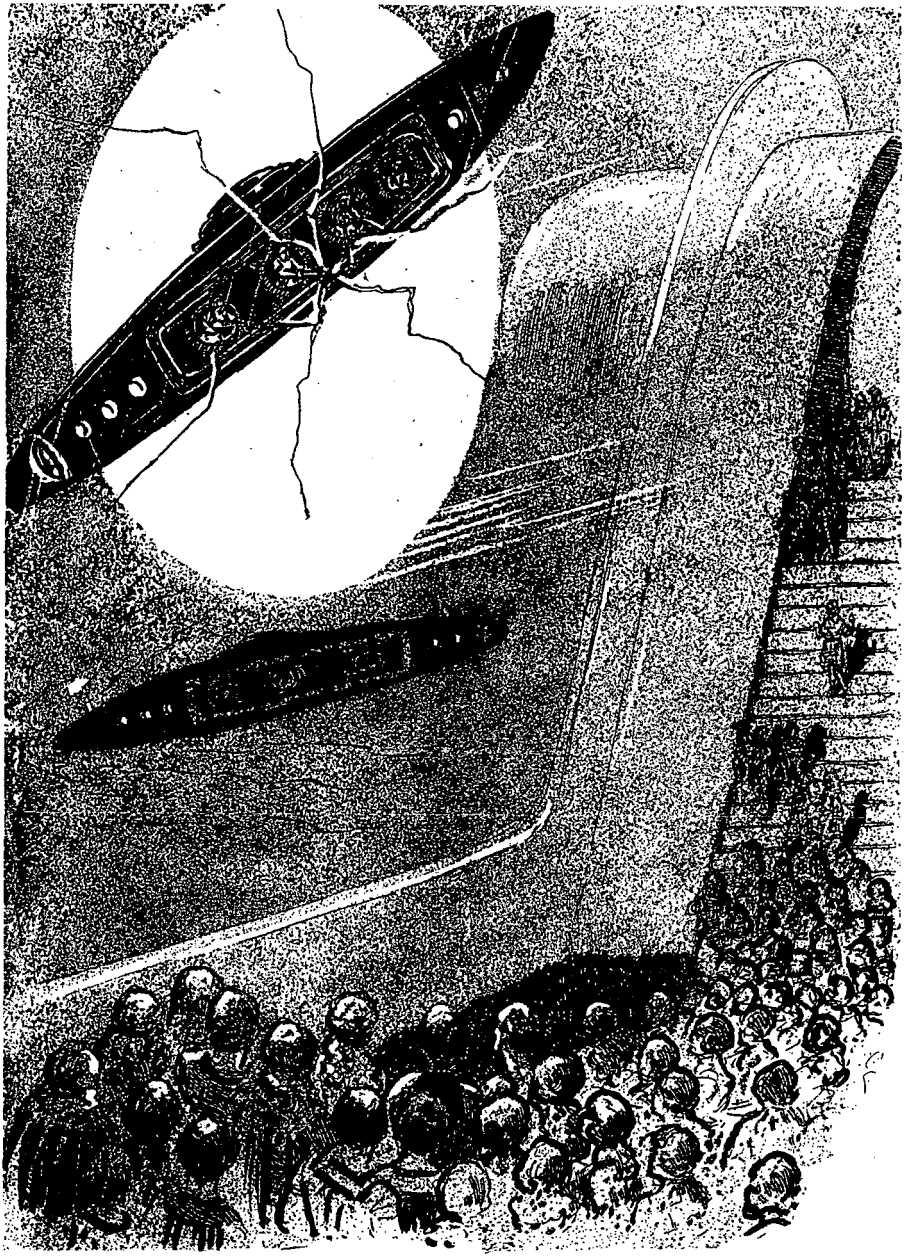

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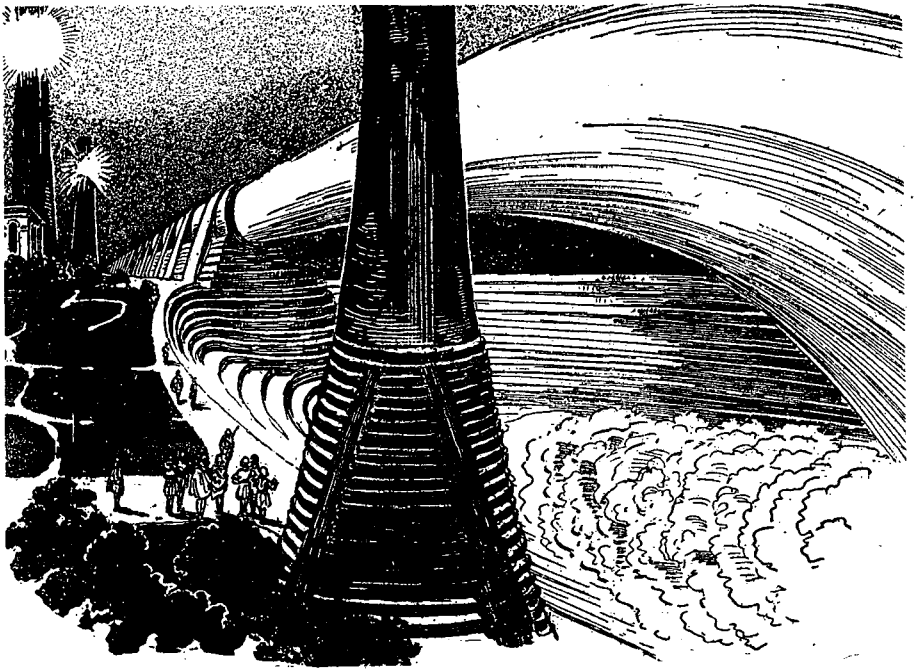

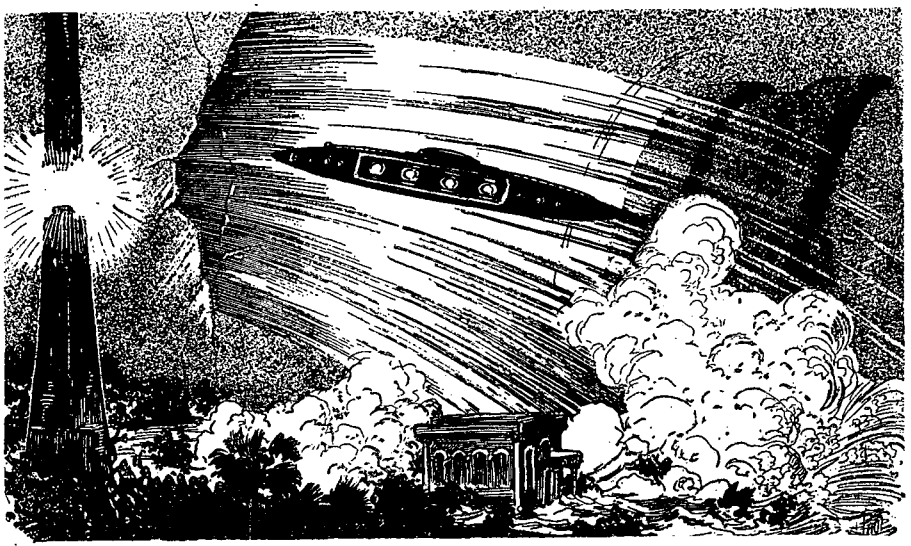

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(continued from page 5)

who had initially acquired it and used it as a landfill) joined with a California development company to apply for rezoning, under PUD, to allow high density apartments. The figure most often bruited about is twelve and one-half million dollars for the development, with the landowners and the developers going into the project as partners.

These people who lived across the street from the land were shocked. So were a great many of the rest of us. What was proposed was a nearly-six-hundred-unit apartment complex, with four large buildings, designed to rent apartments on a furnished basis under a six-month lease to young singles. The California developer, it turned out, was a major builder of southern California "Recreational Complexes" for "Swingers". What was proposed was to export this charming form of residence to our small city.

The local citizenry coalesced into a politically active group and began marshalling an attack upon the planned development. There were several public hearings, both before the City Council and the Planning Commission. The arguments against the development were many, but they centered upon its density, the destruction it would cause to the neighborhood, the impact upon local streets of the added traffic (the developers proposed to provide parking spaces computed on the arcane notion that each apartment would produce .3 car, or one space per three units; if indeed most of the proposed residents will be single, this notion is foolish in the extreme, and if married couples—or even unmarried couples—are envisioned it is more likely each apartment would require space for at least two cars, and that still makes absolutely no provision for visitors. . .), and, in addition, the fact that the Planning Commission itself had only a few years earlier recommended nothing more dense than town houses for that land.

Falls Church is governed by a seven-member City Council which elects one of its number to serve as Mayor (the Mayor chairs Council meetings and is titular head of government). Until a year ago, the Council was dominated by a faction which wanted to see the entire city developed to the hilt, largely backed by real estate interests and the Chamber of Commerce. In the elections last year, three of these Council members (including the Mayor, whose name the pro-development faction took) were roundly defeated and an independent slate, which campaigned vigorously for more restrained growth and a preservation of the city's essentially single-family-residential nature, was elected. We sat back with satisfaction, certain that we, the voters, had expressed our will and our will would be done. (The city has only around 5,000 registered voters two-thirds of whom usually vote; one has a strong sense here that he *can* vote meaningfully.)

We were wrong. The spokesman for the independent slate proved to be weak and vacilating and frighteningly naive about the nature of huge development corporations, and the four remaining members of the previous council united under the leadership of a real estate man whose public face is that of a buffoon; and whose determination seems to be to destroy the character of the city completely. (In one move, he suggested endorsing the construction of Interstate 66, which presently stops at the Capitol Beltway, to the city line—where thousands of daily commuters would have no choice but to make use of Falls Church's local streets in their course to Washington. In this, at least, the remaining Council members opposed him.)

Naturally, when the rezoning proposal hit this Council, it was approved, by a five-to-two vote, the supposed leader of the independants having voted with the majority.

I attended the City Hall hearings, both before the Planning Commission and the Council. In fact, on more than one occasion I was one of more than two dozen who rose to speak in opposition to the rezoning proposal. In the process I found myself becoming more and more allied with those who also opposed the misuse of the PUD ordinance (which was never intended for use in residential areas). But it was obvious from the outset that we had little chance of winning the case. Studies were presented—*which had been made by the City Planning*

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Staff!—which showed that this development would hurt the city financially, that it would not in fact "Broaden the tax base" as its proponants claimed. Traffic studies were introduced which showed the developers' own studies to be misleading at best and perhaps even outright deceptions. Papers were carefully researched and presented. All to no avail. The real estate interests saw a killing in the offing. Plumbers, electrical contractors and a few resdents from the opposite end of the city who saw no harm to *them* in the development all supported it.

As I became more involved in the fight I found it was far from the only case in which the PUD ordinance was being misused. A twelve-storey residence for the elderly was being proposed for the site of a lumber yard which had burned down. Located on a triangle of land between a busy highway and two other commercial streets (but not within the city's present business district), it smacked of the most blatant opportunism by the builder. (Since the builder is applying to the HUD for federal financing, there is a good chance that although the City Council welcomed the project with open arms, it will die at HUD where opposition is strong.) Another real estate company (the same one responsible for those $50,000 prefabs I mentioned) wants to put up a large apartment complex across the street from a high school and (again) within a residential neighborhood. A fourth complex is proposed for another outlying residential part of the city, opposite a church.

Citizen opposition began in the local neighborhoods impinged upon by each of these projects, but is now broadening. Several months ago I joined the Ad Hoc Committee of Citizens for Quality Living in Falls Church, a politically activist group which has since incorporated and hired attorneys to fight not only the individual proposals to which we object, but the entire PUD ordinance. Almost incidental to that, we hope to defeat the present Council at the next election, when the remaining four holdevers' seats can be refilled.

In the meantime I find myself sifting through all the minutes, memoranda and papers pertinant to the PUD ordinance, and just tonight, as I began to write this editorial, the chairman of the committee brought over the copy for the next newsletter—a broadside which we distribute free to every home in the city, and for which I handle the production. (I never seem to find myself far from publishing of one form or another.)

And that's one more item to get cleared away before we set out on our cross-country drive.

LAST ISSUE we changed our typesetters again, for reasons that concern neither thee nor me, and it appears that the typeface we selected was less similar to our previous face than we'd expected. The end result was that we had to hold over *SF in Dimension* (forcing the Panshins to miss an issue for the first time since the column was inaugurated) and cut our letters short. (This problem also cropped up with the November issue of AMAZING, unfortunately.) There was no cut in the normal amount of fiction we published, but the features felt the axe. My apologies for that; I hope we've gotten it straightened out this time around—we'll all know by the time you read this.

FRITZ LEIBER is absent this issue, but I did want to mention a publication which properly deserves review in *Fantasy Books*. As many of you know, August Derleth died last year. The founder and prime mover of Arkham House, a prolific author of both fantasy and regional fiction, Derleth was in many ways a giant among men. I never realized the extent to which this was true until I read *Is*:4, a publication (nominally a fanzine published for the Spectator Amateur Press Society) devoted to Derleth's memory. Therein appeared articles, essays and memoirs by Forrest J. Ackerman, Jacques Bergier, Bill Blackbeard, Robert Bloch, Ray Bradbury, Lin Carter, Avram Davidson, Fritz Leiber, Frank Belknap Long, Robert A.W. Lowndes, Emil Petaja, E. Hoffman Price, A.E. van Vogt, Manly Wade Wellman, Colin Wilson, Gahan Wilson, Larry Niven and Sprague de Camp, to name only some of the contributors to

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this massive volume.

Tom Collins, whose publication *Is* is, tells me that copies are still available for $3.00, and I urge you, if your interest runs at all to the mainstream of fantasy, to buy a copy. I guarantee you hours of fascinating reading. (Copies can be obtained from Collins at 4305 Balcones Dr., Austin, Texas, 78731.) (The subsequent issue is now out: 100 pages dealing with the history of the Spectator Amateur Press Society on the advent of that organization's 100th mailing, for $1.50; I blush to admit that I am one of the many contributors.)

MASTHEAD WATCHERS will have noticed another change in our editorial lineup last issue. Moshe Feder has, for the time being, replaced Alan Shaw as our Trusty Proofreader, while Alan takes a much deserved break and a visit to British Vancouver. Our thanks to Moshe for stepping in to take over Alan's chores. (Yesterday a letterhack, today an Editorial Position; what tomorrow?)

AND FINALLY, I'm pleased as all hell to have Sprague de Camp's "The Fallible Fiend" in this issue (and next issue, as well); the publication of this novel marks, I think, a turning point in FANTASTIC's fortunes as a *fantasy* magazine. "The Fallible Fiend" would have honored the pages of *Unknown*, had it been written at the time of the publication of that most-esteemed magazine, and long-time fans of *Unknown*-type fantasy will hail its appearance in any case, but for those of you who weren't lucky enough to be around in those long-gone days, the appearance of this novel in these pages will be an extra treat. I hope that with his column for us, *Literary Swordsmen & Sorcerers*, and his recent Conan collaborations, Sprague is entering a new period of literary fecundity, during which we'll be seeing much more from him in the way of new fiction.

In any case, in recent months we've been privileged to publish a great deal more in the way of genuine fantasy than had been available to us previously—especially in the longer lengths. Avram Davidson's "The Forges of Nainland Are Cold," de Camp & Carter's "The Witch of the Mists," Sprague's present novel—all were a joy for me to read and a pleasure for me to publish. And the trend continues: following "The Fallible Fiend," the Panshins' long-awaited fantasy novel, and after that—? Time will tell, but you can be sure it will be worth sticking around for.

—TED WHITE

A FINE NIGHT TO BE ALIVE

(continued from page 81)

Dick dropped the car keys by his body. He pulled the glove off his right hand and wiped his eyes.

He looked down at Palmer and said, "I just want you to understand."

—ALEXEI PANSHIN

REALWORLD

(continued from page 84)

bothering me much, now.

I thought of my last words to Doctor Baumer:

"If you think you're going to stick *me* in your real world for the rest of my life, Doctor, you're the one who's crazy."

—F. M. BUSBY

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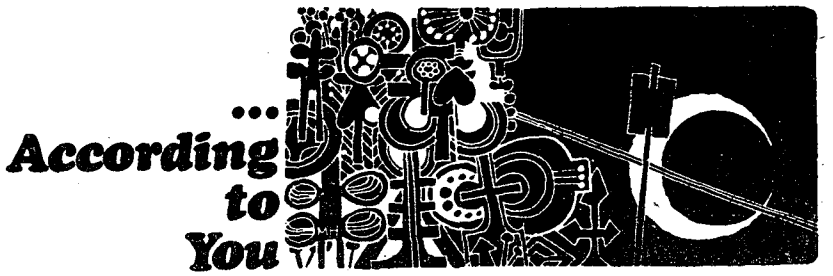

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Last issue, owing to a miscalculation with the typestyle offered by a new typesetter, we found ourselves running way over the limit and were forced to pare considerably—with the result that a full nine pages of letters (already set in type) had to be held over. These follow immediately. Hopefully by next issue we'll have everything squared away and can catch up on more recent letters at some greater length.—TW

Dear Ted,

Perhaps I have a solution to the problem you discuss concerning Hugo voting and the rising cost of convention memberships. On the one hand, it seems that little if anything can be done about this rise in costs. As you point out, they've risen steadily over the past few years, and as far as I can see, this process seems if anything to be increasing. Each convention is more and more expensive, both in terms of overall costs and specifically in terms of membership fees. Costs spiral upward, with no end in sight. But must this mean problems with Hugo voting as well? Not necessarily, if we try out a pet idea of mine. Under the current system, The Hugo is an integral part of the World Science Fiction Convention. Every person wishing to vote on the Hugo *must* join the convention, whether he wishes to or not, and must pay the membership prices required. At the same time, every person who joins the convention automatically receives a vote on the Hugo, whether he's really interested in this or not. Thus a great many people seriously interested and concerned with the award must pay to join a convention they may have no desire or interest in either attending or supporting. Similarly, a number of people who have no interest or knowledge in the awards still get to vote, because they are interested in the convention. The solution—separate the two entirely. Set up a separate Hugo committee, to administer all phases of Hugo nomination and voting. This committee has numerous advantages over the present system. Besides removing the problem of joining the convention, it also frees the convention committees from the work involved with the awards, a freedom more and more needed with the rising size of conventions. In addition, it assures a committee what will enforce a more standard set of annual rules than current committees, which seem often inclined to reinterpret the categories themselves each year.

A *possible*, but not necessary addi-

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tion to this, would be to charge a *minimal* fee, just as we do with TAFF ballots and with con-site voting. The idea, as with those two projects, would be to set a small fee anyone could afford—but which would tend to discourage people who weren't *really* interested in the award from bothering to vote. The important thing is to keep the fee down—the idea is to discourage people who aren't serious, not to raise money. Probably the major problem is the whole idea of deciding just exactly *who* is to make up the committee, fandom being notorious for not agreeing on anything like this. . . . . but I think it could be worked out. It seems to me as if the idea couldn't help but improve the situation, and really couldn't hurt at all. What do you think, Ted?

This whole book review thing brings up a number of questions, some of which you've probably thought about. Perhaps one of the basic problems is simply, what is the ultimate aim of a book column in a professional sf magazine? At the core, should it be oriented towards review, or should they attempt to be actual criticism? In other words, on one side we have the buying-guide sort of book review, the type of column P. Schyler Miller writes. He doesn't pretend to be writing criticism; he gives you the plot of the book, tells you if *he* liked it, and tries to give you some idea whether *you'll* like it. On the other extreme, we had Judith Merrill in *F & SF*, who attempted to go beyond review into criticism, and whose columns made very little sense if you hadn't read the books in question (and sometimes not even then). In fanzines, the majority of work is certainly of the former type, but that which anybody remembers is almost always the second variety. A superb review I read yesterday in *SF Commentary* is a case in point. Editor Bruce Gillespie discussed Bob Tucker's *The Year of the Quiet Sun* in detail in that review; he presented a number of most convincing ideas, made me see things I'd missed on first reading, and sent me back to rereading the novel. Essentially, this is something of what Alexei and Cory are doing in their column in FANTASTIC, and very much so in this issue. They assume their readers have a good deal of familiarity with the basic authors and novels in question, and if you don't have this familiarity, you're going to miss a large percentage of the impact of their arguments. In the particular case of the FANTASTIC columns, Fritz Leiber seemed to have written mainly a fantasy buying guide, telling his readers what had been published and what he thinks they should buy. In your reviews, and the ones you've printed from other writers, it seems as if you've tried to walk the line between these two opposing philosophies. In a relatively limited space, your writers have tried to tell the casual reader enough about the book to give him an idea about whether or not he should buy it; at the same time, most of them have done their best to go farther than this, and to get into some sort of serious appraisal of the achievements and flaws in the novel.

Then, in your editorial here, you speak about working toward a policy "of wider value" to the readers, and I wonder what your choice will be. The most *logical* choice would seem to be the buying-guide area; you have some excellent critics (including yourself) and you also have the Panshins' column. Seems to me that to benefit the

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most people, your choice would be to try to recommend those works your writers feel significant and important in the field. By doing this, you can do a great service to the majority of your 30,000+ readers—rather than emphasizing the truly critical aspect, which only the great minority would favor. For these, there remains the Panshins' column—not to mention the infinite world of fanzines, and the fast-growing world of academic discussion of science fiction.

Speaking of fiction, I finally got around to reading some of your more recent serialized novels—notably "The Lathe of Heaven," "The Byworlder," and "The Wrong End of Time"—have been most impressed indeed. With the rare exceptions of Bob Silverberg's novels in *Galaxy*, it seems as if all the novel-length fiction of any quality being published in any prozines is being published here. You don't really realize this until you take a moment to think about it, but nonetheless it has become the case.

Interesting that you say reaction from most readers has been particularly good to deCamp's biographical pieces, and I think I see why this has been so. Almost anyone who reads science fiction is also interested in reading *about* science fiction and science fiction writers, and thus the reader features of one kind or another in virtually every magazine. This, of course, is one of the main obvious attractions of fandom and fanzines—the sf reader enters a world where people spend many pages writing this additional material. I know I felt this way, and the whole idea reflects the early initial interest in science fiction most fans show. What I wasn't realizing at all was that most of your readers simply haven't read all the fanzines that the fans in the audience have, and haven't been through much of this time and time again. For most people, this is as new as the fiction—and I shouldn't complain because *for me* it isn't fresh, new, and different.

Fans always talk about time-binding, and such is the case of the story you've got here from Roger Ebert. I first got active in fandom while spending a year at the University of Chicago, 1967-68. While there, I was lucky enough to see *2001: A Space Odessey* the week it opened; like most of fandom, I was impressed with the picture, and I wanted to echo this interest in my fanzine. Up until that point, I'd seen very few reviews of the picture I could agree with, and some of those in major magazines were *so* wrong-headed . . . well, you remember. As it happened, about the only decent study of the picture I did come across was a three-part discussion in one of the local Chicago papers. I was so impressed by this that I wrote the author and the newspaper, and received permission to reprint the reviews in one of my fanzines. Of course, the reviewer was Roger Ebert—and it's kind of ironic to see that his first published story coincides with the release of "A Clockwork Orange", Stanley Kubrick's *next* film. One of the few things I enjoyed at all about the whole city of Chicago was Roger's reviews—he seemed one of the most lucid reviewers around, and one of the few able to go beyond his own biases in discussing a film.

I'm impressed, as usual, with Alexei and Cory's discussion here, but somehow I find their basic argument a bit less convincing than in the past. I'll

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go along with all the background information up to the point where the analysis of *The World of Null-A* begins. Now, the analysis in terms of analogy, symbol, and myth is certainly fascinating, but they haven't made a strong enough case for it in my mind. I can accept each part of their argument as possible and valid from the evidence, but at the same time I generally fail to see that their conclusions are *necessary*. In making some very important and basic statements to the overall structure of their argument, the Panshins have chosen to use this van Vogt novel as an example, but I don't think they've been careful enough in communicating their vision to us (or at least, to me). In some cases, I can accept the point made easily, as with the presentation of the lack of reality and logic behind the null-A system. But in all too many points, I can see only that their ideas are possible interpretations, but not that they are the necessary ones that make the whole argument work. Perhaps the fault lies with me, for not being able to follow the arguments clearly; it just seems that Alexei and Cory are saying some very important things about the field in this column, and I guess I wish they'd try a little harder to communicate some of these insights to us.

Bill Graham's artwork definitely does have a very *Creepy* feel to it; I'll take your word that he's capable of much better, though his work here too seems to me pretty mediocre. Also in your comments on my letter—I wasn't really overlooking DeCamp's Conan work, but rather discounting it as "original" fiction. Actually, I agree with you about Lin Carter. From what I've read, I think he's capable of some highly enjoyable fantasy—but from what I've read, I don't think he bothers to work at it very often. However, he has done a magnificent job in *editing* the Ballentine Adult Fantasy series. In presenting modern readers with cheap editions of a whole world of classic fantasies, Lin has done the field as great a service as Terry Carr did in presenting the Ace Special series, with the advantage that apparently the Adult Fantasies are making money for Ballentine (while the Specials were not particularly financially successful). How about special Hugos in Los Angeles for both Lin and Terry, for their contributions to the field in the form of these series.

JERRY LAPIDUS
54 Clearview Drive
Pittsford, N.Y. 14534

Dear Mr. White,

Alexei Panshin seems to have missed, surprisingly, the deliberate point of all the bluff in van Vogt. As sf writers often invoke pseudo-science, AEvV invokes pseudo-logic and pseudo-philosophy. This is harder than faking science. Poul Anderson has a lot of real, detailed chemistry to help him flesh out a fictional assumption in exobiology. But higher logic or what ever would be like nothing we've ever seen before, and when you fake it, it has to look the part. Requires almost mystical originality. So I'll forgive a degree of "Panshin considered it Nexially. The neural barriers went down". He does better. "The Proxy Intelligence" has a good bit; all nonsense, but with enough apparent method in it to make one want to fit it into a rational scheme of things.

Requiring that a description of superthought or superlanguage be logically pukkah is rather like requiring that fic-

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tional hyperdrives work. If AEvV writes nonsense, it doesn't follow that the key to the story has to be in his involuntary foibles. Moreover, the Two-year old situation is a simple consequence of some people knowing the ropes better than others; exactly what would happen if there were great differences in reasoning or perception between people. It doesn't mean there must be a buried two-year-old inside AEvV struggling to articulate his bewilderment.

The power of van Vogt's stories is that he is nearly unique. Other writers have taken small, accurate bites at superthought etc, mostly in the punchlines of short stories, but who else has bluffed his way through a rousing game of guns with superthought as a premise? Charles Harness, several times; Robert Heinlein once. Who else appears to pull the foundations of reality out from under you so many times in a chapter? Lafferty, and that's about it.

For my money van Vogt's appeal is intellectual, and I'd say that even if I couldn't produce one clear idea from the whole corpus.

JONATHAN BURNS
23 Lee Man Park,
Raub, Pahang,
Malaysia

Dear Ted:

A preponderance of the comments I make in this letter refer to Alexei and Cory Panshin's "The Resurrection of SF II," their *SF in Dimension* installment for the June 1972 issue of FANTASTIC.

The keynote of the article is, of course, its introductory sentence: "The chief distinction between mimetic fiction and speculative fantasy is that in mimetic fiction the objective rules the subjective, and in speculative fantasy the subjective rules the objective." From that point on, the Panshins' article is an explication at length of this simple-seeming but conceptually complex statement. The aesthetic, didactic, and transcendent examples put forth early on and throughout the entire article are merely proofs (and interesting proofs at that) meant to back that statement as being an acceptable summation of the elements involved in one *segment* of a whole definition of what speculative fantasy is.

I say the Panshins' latest installment is merely a segment of an entire definition because it by itself cannot, and never will, be a complete definition of what speculative fantasy is. That's obvious. Additionally, it can be applied to non-sf mediums of literature. For instance, in existential literature the subjective rules the objective, as in speculative fantasy. I can think of two good examples which demonstrate this: *Steppenwolf*, by Hermann Hesse; and *The Lathe of Heaven*, by Ursula K. LeGuin. Here are two novels that approach a like theme very differently. That theme: we can (must) bear with reality; though we be George Orrs or Harry Hallers, we all have the strength, or must generate that strength, to do so. It is not reality, but unreality, which unmans and eventually undoes or destroys us.

On light reading, *Steppenwolf* assumes the guise of a fantasy. In part, it is. But the fantasy is completely internal: it exists only in the mind of Herr Harry Haller. The transcendent realm (the Magic Theater) and the transcendent aliens (the Immortals, Mozart, Pablo, Harry himself as the

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steppenwolf) are all wild conjurings of Haller's unreal existence. That which is objective in the book can be viewed as still being objective by the reader, if he cares to step outside Haller's consciousness. But through the eyes of Haller, the steppenwolf, that which is objective is distorted into the subjective, and as applies to Haller (or any other type-existential character) the subjective rules the objective. This distortion and conversion of the objective world into a world of subjective values is what sets a novel like *Steppenwolf* outside the admittedly blurred boundaries of speculative fantasy. It is also what sets it outside the realm of mimetic fiction.

The Lathe of Heaven, on the other hand, is a very different matter. The fantasy world of George Orr is internal, but ceases to be so when he dreams *effectively*. The reality within the context of Ursula's novel is subjective to us because it is set outside out reality. Again within the context of the novel, the objective and the subjective exist, but only for George Orr and Heather Leleche—not the reader. We see their objective world and values vicariously, so to speak. That particular batch of information is transmitted to us through their eyes only, which is what makes it subjective to us. The objective world that Orr sees is distorted by him, but never attains conversion into a world of internal subjective values, because once he distorts internally (in his effective dreams), the distortion becomes external and all are affected by it. What is real becomes unreal; what is unreal, real. A third time, within the context of the reality in Ursula's novel, this actually occurs. Within the context of our here and now reality, it does not (or at least, we're not *aware* of its occuring). The transcendent realm (the future) and, in this case, the transcendent power (effective dreaming) rather than the transcendent aliens of *Steppenwolf*, are not wild conjurings of George Orr's existence. They are—and Orr exists within their framework. George Orr sees reality objectively *as well as* subjectively. Harry Haller does not. The distortions of reality are as external as they are internal to Orr. They are wholly internal to Haller. Orr has no control over his distortions: they happen and he knows them for what they are. Haller, if he chooses to exercise it, does have this control over his distortions, even though he does not know them for what they are.

Two novels of different mediums, approaching the same theme, in which the subjective rules the objective. In *Steppenwolf*, it is in the *existential* sense. In *The Lathe of Heaven*, it is in the sense of speculative fantasy. I hope the distinctions I have drawn are clear.

Another interesting point that ties in nicely with the Panshins' article has to do with the concept of "a willing suspension of disbelief." What, precisely, is this willing suspension of disbelief? Simply put, it is the ability of the sf reader to accept the subjective in an sf novel as being the objective; the ability to set aside the really real in this world for that which is the really real in the world the sf story depicts, even though it does not exist in the here and now. This ability and the willingness to use it is, in fact, requisite to sf reading, if the reader is to obtain anything meaningful from the sf novel or short story (enjoyment, entertainment, insight, whatever). Requisite because the reader must gauge what is happening through

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the eyes of the characters or, as Alex and Cory point out, through the narrative. There are no real world correlatives by which to do the gauging.

In a round-about way, this brings us back to George Orr and Harry Haller. No willing suspension of disbelief is required to read or gain something meaningful from *Steppenwolf*. Real world correlatives *do* exist by which the reader may guage the distorted world view of Harry Haller and the world as it really is. None such exist for *The Lathe of Heaven*. All correlatives must come from within the context of the novel itself. Suspending the here and now reality of *this* world and substituting it with the reality of George Orr *must* occur before any insights of his world are to be gleaned. So it is with all sf.

You, Ted, stated in a previous issue of either FANTASTIC or AMAZING (I don't recall which) that you felt sf gave one a more worldly view of reality than did contemporary literature. I suspect that this willing suspension of disbelief is largely responsible for that more worldly view. I further suspect that it is an unavoidable, purely natural by-product of sf reading. By being able to accept the existence of another reality (even though a fiction), I would expect that a thinking individual would eventually develop a clearer conception of the reality he exists in.

In closing this portion of my letter, I would add that the reason it is so difficult to hammer out a clear definition of speculative fantasy is *because* speculative fantasy is subjective rather than objective. Existential philosophers ran into the same difficulties when they attempted to define existentialism: no brief, simple definition existed that could wholly define what it was. They opted for the anthology approach—compiling essays and fiction to provide an explanation and a definition at length. It appears that Alex has found this out early in the game, discovering that he must write a book *about* speculative fantasy in order to define it. I'll venture a guess that that book will be something spectacular. It will, of course, out rank the Lundwall debacle astronomically.

Going from the specific to the general, then:

The Pederson cover was pretty good—much better than the one I comment on in the July issue of AMAZING. I hope you can continue using the fluorescent inks you've used in the past. They stand out quite well and make for a far more interesting cover. Haven't finished the Eklund serial yet, so I'll reserve critical comment on it and simply say it's excellent so far. Most of his fiction has been.

Calling Toomey's "Section - I" Kafkaesque is, I think, stretching the imagination a little far—for me it is, any way. It's a clever little story, ironic in a sense, but hardly deserving of such an illustrious classification. Malzberg's "Breaking In," however—now *that's* Kafkaesque in the real sense of the word! I'm thinking, specifically, of Kafka's "The Bucket Rider," or his "Three Parables." All the Malzberg super-shorts, in fact, have been rather Kafkaesque vignettes.

Hmmmm. I seem to have gotten carried away with my letter writing this time. So I'll sign off with just, I enjoyed the whole damn issue . . .

GENE VAN TROYER
806 NE 4th
Gresham, OR 97030

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Dearest Ted:

Re: "You pique my curiosity—just what do you think are (sic) 'modern selling concepts'?" Your reply to my letter, June FANTASTIC.

"Modern selling concepts" is [sic] the presentation of a product in such ways as to accent those factors which appeal to the largest audience. In the case of magazines this covers distribution, format, and content.

You have lamented several times the situtation with distributors. They have the small magazines by the short hairs. Until A and F's circulation figures are high enough you'll just have to learn to work with, around, or without distributors.

Let's skip format for a moment to go briefly to content.

On the whole the fiction content of both mags is tolerable to good which is far better than their main source of competion, television. Non-fiction areas need improvement.

Now, what are some of the changes possible in format and content which are in keeping with modern selling concepts?

1. Balance of fiction and articles—not less fiction but more articles dealing with the genre and with the future as it relates to the present. This will draw a wider range of reader interests.

2. Use of signatures of slick paper to provide suitable surface for ad and art copy. Non-art could remain on lower quality paper.

3. Development of low cost changes in format to spark reader identification with magazine:

A. Increased letter space where fans would be allowed to carry on correspondence within a strict word limit,

B. Spotlight column which introduces a writer or fan (similar to *Galaxy's* col.),

C. Backing advertisements on slick paper (where allowed by purchaser) with saveable art,

D. A convention calendar.

4. A six cover tri-fold cover—covers 1 through 4 remaining as is and with 5th used for frameable color art unbroken by type and 6th for ad.

5. Moving table of contents with copyright information to inside cover which is removed by distributor for claiming a no sell. This will make the selling of coverless copies a violation of copyright laws.

6. Numbering inside mag and on cover consecutively. Each month print a list of covers returned or those believed to be illegally returned, requesting readers with copies matching these numbers mail same and sales slip to you for a nominal reward and replacement copy. Shifty dealers could then be located.

7. Introduction of a regular column to be written each month by a different famous person to draw readers from outside the science fiction world. Such a regular feature could prove a major selling point in itself since magazine buyers often purchase a particular magazine to read one item. Some people subscribe to newspapers just to read the obits, Ann Landers, or the comix.

8. Covers which appeal to a wider variety of people.

9. Removal or lessening in size of SF on the cover since this is an embarrassment to persons who would otherwise be regular readers (Note: *Playboy's* success with printing sf).

10. Adoption of names for mags

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more meaningful than the worn cliches of the Thirties.

These are just a few of the possible changes in format and content which if coupled with complete honesty with present readers about extent of changes, their nature, meaning, and desirability would without doubt increase sales of both magazines, draw more advertising, and expell fears for the future. Costs in some cases might only be offset such, but the desirability of higher circulation in the low circulation brackets are clear, higher advertising rates, lower unit printing costs, and great circulation dip protection.

I believe the readers and advertising gained through these changes, tricks if you will, would come back for more, but only if the internal quality of the mags warranted such. After all it is not the distributors who sell magazines, but content.

If you give a reader what he wants no matter whether he thinks he likes science fiction or not he will be back. You may have gone out of your way to get him to buy, but you haven't tricked him unless you fail to give him what was promised.

I think this is no different than the same methods practiced now which are designed only to attract regular sf readers, a very limited readership hardly deserving of having the good fiction in A and F all to themselves. They will continue to have it so until those millions of other possible customers are given a reason, excuse, or incentive to buy.

For the present—get rid of that "New" and "All New" from the cover and contents page. It rings phony because the word is used so often in the bad advertising (old selling concepts) which intends to trick. It implies by its existance that there might be some doubt about the newness of the stories. Readers not familiar with the recent history of the two mags will take this for the old trick of putting the green sparkles in the old soap and not buy.

I hope I haven't offended you by bluntness. These are afterall only one person's ideas and subject to error. I write them first to answer your question with more detail than a simple. "No, I don't believe a tricked reader will return," and to point our avenues of change. Unlike many of my generation who like experience much impatience I don't expect to find you've adopted any or all of my suggestions. I am one of those readers who will go on buying A and F as long as they stay on the stands (it's getting harder and harder to find copies) and maybe someday subscribe. Just the same I would like to see both mags with circulation figures reflecting their value.

MARGRET TICKLEBRIDGES
c/o The Advocate
2600 Mission Bell Dr.
San Pablo, Ca. 94806

Fair enough—your ideas have a lot of validity—but you simply don't take into account several practical realities. For instance, your topic #1: In a recent issue of Locus, *Anthony Lewis (who reviews the professional sf magazines there) takes us to task for the number of pages we already devote to non-fiction, and asks his readers for support on this stand. Clearly, we can't please everyone all the time, but I'd guess that our present balance of fiction to non-fiction is about the limit. Then too, we try not to directly compete with the other sf magazines with our choice of*

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features. We already give our readers a larger forum than other magazines and your points B and D would simply duplicate existing features in Galaxy *and* If. *Items 2, 4, 6, and 7 simply lie outside our present budget. Item 5 just wouldn't work that way—for the most part only the title strips with the logos are torn off anyway. Item 8 is subjective; appeal* how? *We try to vary the type of art from issue to issue and we use the brightest, most appealing covers in the field. Item 9 is based on the assumption that the words "Science Fiction" turn people off. I don't believe this is true; the people who are repelled by the label are usually also repelled by the stories themselves (cf. Peter S. Prescott in* Newsweek*). Further, I find it hard to believe that* Playboy's *phenomenal success can be credited to the sf which sometimes appears in that magazine. And finally, in reference to your 10th item, changing a magazine's name is a tricky business from a number of standpoints, and carries with it no guarantee of acceptance for the new title. (We queried our readers a few years ago about changes in this magazine's title; the results led to the title it has now.) Our continued use of the word "new" is a direct result of the fact that, for five years, this magazine contained reprints, and at one time was mostly a reprint magazine. Many of our readers are still only now coming back and rediscovering us.*

That wraps it up for another issue. Some of you will have noted that my replies to the foregoing letters are absent in many cases. The pressures of time and of space were responsible; not only are we getting more letters than ever before, but many of them are longer. Still on hand are enough letters—good letters which I want to publish—for most of next issue's *According To You*. So stay with us—the best is yet to come!—TED WHITE

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AMAZING and FANTASTIC (1963–1970), S F GREATS, THRILLING S.F., S F ADVENTURE CLASSICS, STRANGE FANTASY, SPACE ADVENTURES, SCIENCE FANTASY, ASTOUNDING S F, FANTASTIC ADVENTURES YEARBOOK—1970, THE STRANGEST STORIES EVER TOLD, SCIENCE FICTION CLASSICS—MOST ISSUES AVAILABLE (60¢). ULTIMATE PUB. CO., BOX 7, OAKLAND GARDENS, FLUSHING, N.Y. 11364.

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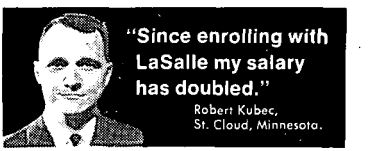

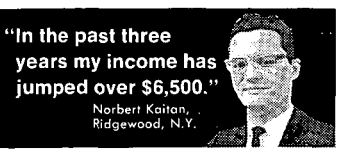

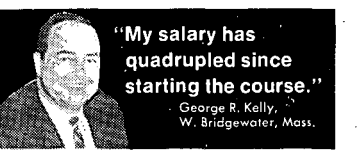

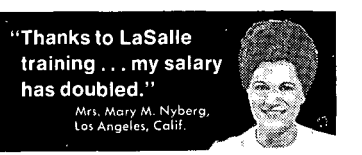

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